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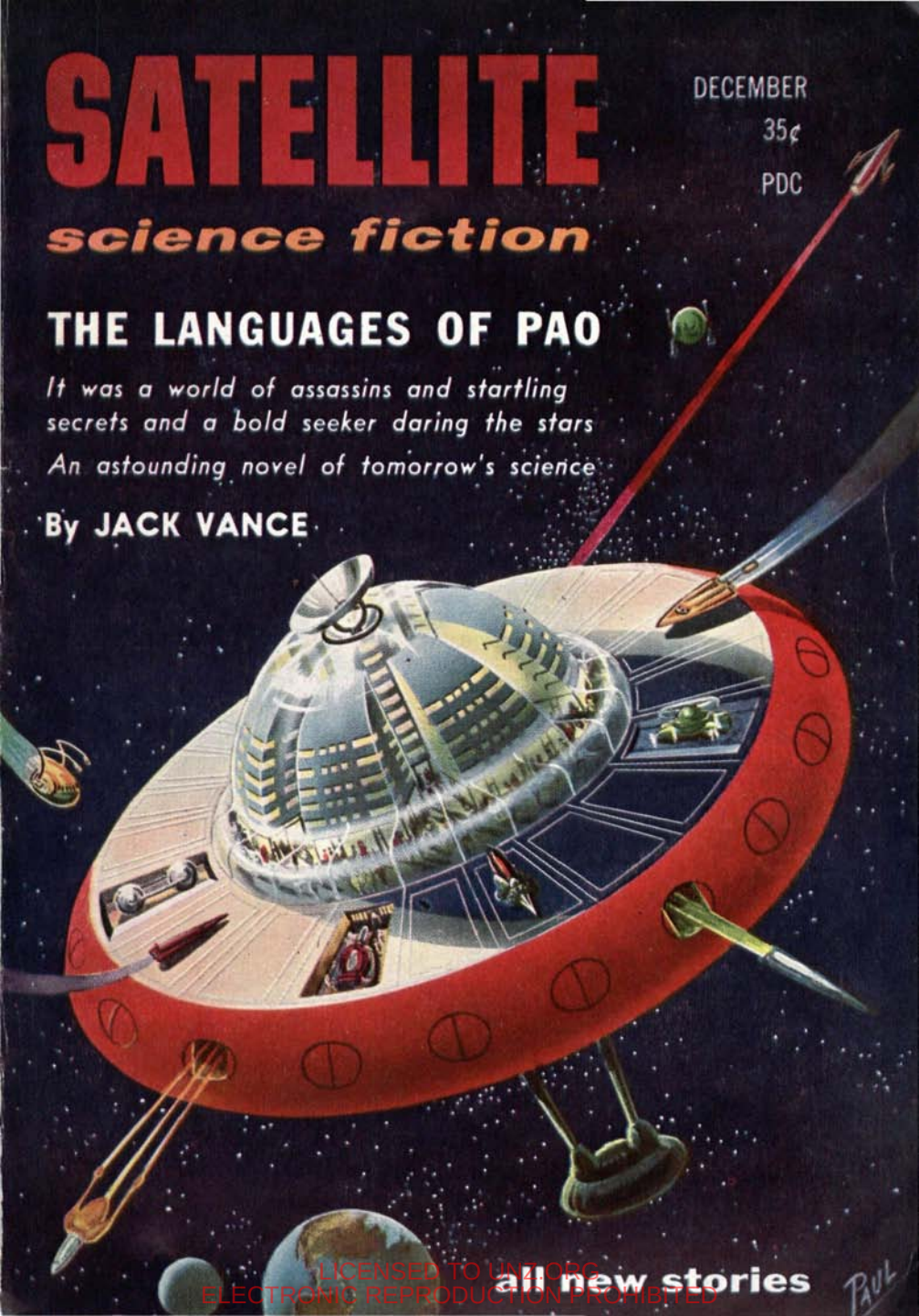
THE LANGUAGES OF PAO

It was a world of assassins and startling secrets and a bold seeker daring the stars

An astounding novel of tomorrow's science

By JACK VANCE



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The Ultimate Space Station

This month's cover illustration is an artist's interpretation of what the *ultimate* Earth satellite station will look like, done by a man who is generally regarded as "The Dean of Science Fiction Illustrators"—FRANK R. PAUL.

It is singularly appropriate that he should have selected this theme, since the first full-color painting of an Earth satellite in history—it appeared on the cover of the August, 1929 issue of *Science Wonder Stories*—was also the work of Mr. Paul. That early painting was based on the history-making theories of Herman Oberth as interpreted by Captain Hermann Norrdung in his book, "The Problems of Space Flying." The present illustration is designed to coincide with the most advanced theories of today, projected by the power of Paul's remarkable imagination and creative ability into the far future.

Born in Vienna, in 1884, Frank R. Paul studied art in Vienna, Paris, and London and also completed courses as a mechanical and architectural draftsman.

Editors have claimed that the machines Paul drew were so carefully designed that they would actually function if built, and it is his own astonishing claim that of the thousands of spaceships he has drawn in his long career, he has never used the same design twice! Paul's drawings have appeared frequently in LIFE magazine, and he designed the Johnson & Johnson building in New Brunswick, N. J., which is generally regarded as a classic of modern industrial architecture.

But in calling attention to the cover illustration—and we're quite frankly more than proud of it—we mustn't forget this month's complete novel—THE LANGUAGES OF PAO by Jack Vance. We haven't too much space left to tell you just how great a novel we think it is. But that doesn't matter too much, really, for a story as magnificently imaginative as this one maintains its hold on the reader on every unfolding page.

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SATELLITE
science fiction

DECEMBER, 1957 Vol. 2, No. 2.

A COMPLETE NOVEL

THE LANGUAGES OF PAO

by JACK VANCE

The men and women of the Planet Pao were cruelly imprisoned in a gigantic anthill of human inertia. Could the creative genius of one lonely youth kindle a tiny spark of hope to . . . soaring flame?

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FRANK R. PAUL
Cover Art

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SATELLITE SCIENCE FICTION, Vol. 2, No. 2. Published bi-monthly by Renown Publications, Inc., 501 Fifth Avenue, N. Y. 17. Subscriptions, 6 issues $2.00; 12 issues $4.00; single copies 35¢. Entered as second class matter at the post office, New York, N. Y. Additional entry at Concord, N. H. Places and characters in this magazine are wholly fictitious.

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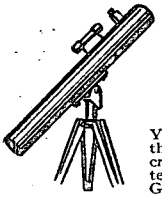

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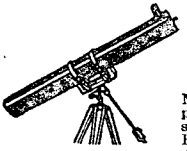

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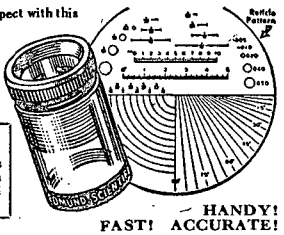

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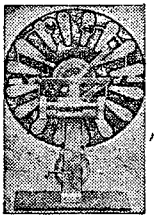

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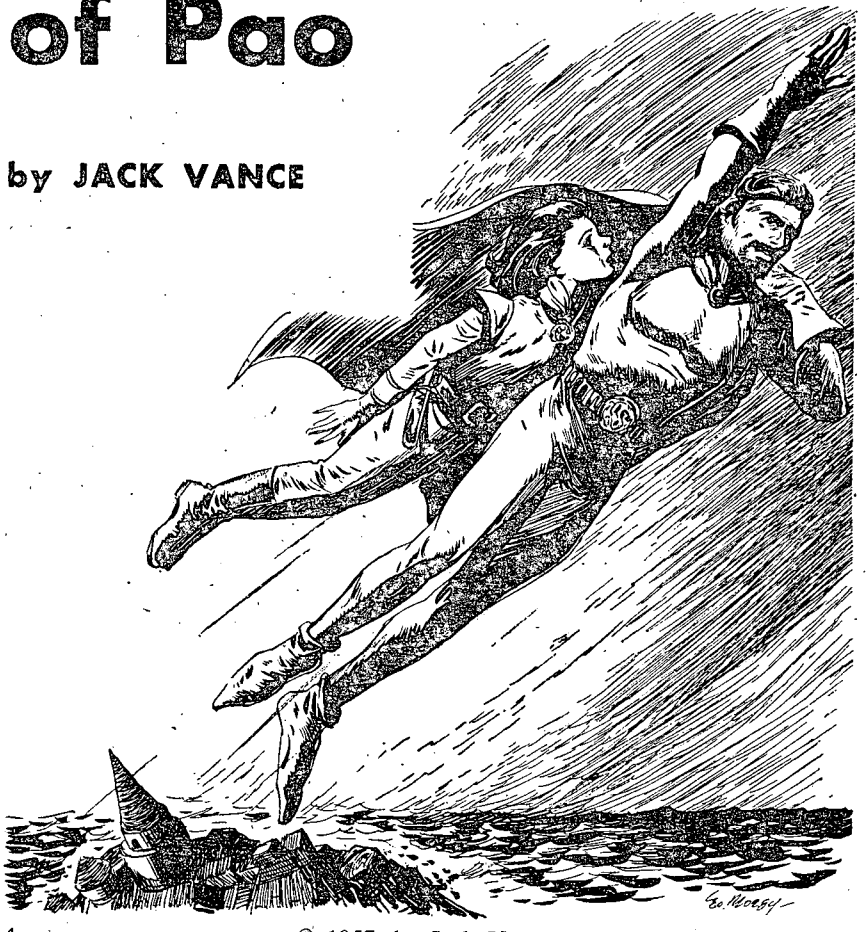
A COMPLETE NOVEL OF WORLDS IN CONFLICT

The Languages of Pao

by JACK VANCE



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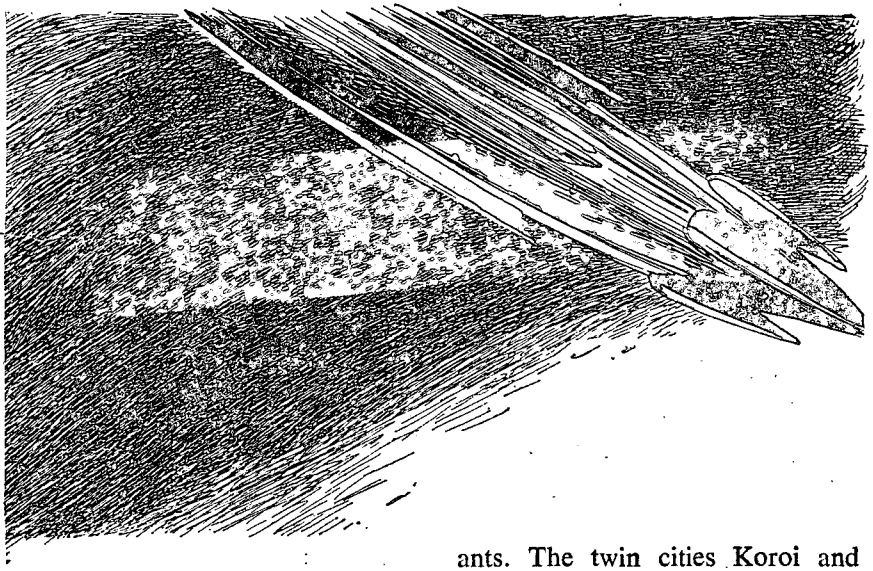
It was the most daring of youthful dreams . . . the building of a new world on the stepping stones of a new language. But first— there were wild, rebellious stallions to master.



In the heart of the Polymark Cluster, circling the yellow star Auriol, is the planet Pao. An accurate census of the planet has never been made, for there are limits to what may be accomplished by simple enumeration. Eiljanre on Minamand is the largest city, with six million inhabitants. The twin cities Koroi and Sherifte on Impland share another six million between them. There are perhaps a hundred other cities of over half a million, but the great mass of population—estimated at fifteen billion persons—lives in country villages.

They are scattered throughout the eight continents which range the equator at approximately equal intervals—Aimand, Shraimand, Vidamand, Minamand,

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Nonamand, Dronamand, Hivand and Impland. Aimand, the largest of the continents, has four times the area of Nonamand, the least. Only Nonamand, in the high southern latitudes, suffers an unpleasant climate.

The Paonese are a homogeneous people, of medium stature, fair-skinned, with hair-color ranging from tawny brown to brown-black, and with no great variations of feature or physique. They are so similar the extra-planetary visitor, traveling from continent to continent, has the peculiar sense of meeting the same persons again and again.

Paonese history previous to the reign of Panarch Aiello Panasper is uneventful. The first settlers, arriving from Waydale and finding the planet hospitable, multiplied to an unprecedented density of population. Their system of life minimized social friction; there were no large wars, no plagues, no disasters except recurrent famine, which was endured with fortitude.

A simple uncomplicated people were the Paonese, without religion or cult. They demanded small material rewards from life, but gave a correspondingly large importance to shifts of caste and status. They knew no competitive sports, but enjoyed gathering in enormous clots of ten or twenty million persons to chant the ancient drones.

The typical Paonese farmed a small acreage, augmenting his income with a home craft or special trade. He showed small interest in politics; his hereditary ruler, the Panarch, exercising an absolute personal rule which reached out, through a vast civil service, into the most remote village. The word "career" in Paonese was synonymous to employment with the civil service.

In general, the government was sufficiently efficient, the Panarch not too flagrantly corrupt. In the event of unusual abuse the people countered with passive resistance, a vast surly inanition which neither threat, penalty nor blandishment could dissolve. It was a weapon used only seldom, but the fact of its existence held the normal human peccancy of the ruling caste within reasonable bounds.

The language of Pao was derived from Waydalic, but molded into forms peculiarly Paonese. "The farmer chops down a tree." In Paonese the literal rendition would be: "Farmer *in state of exertion;* axe *agency;* tree *in state of subjection to attack*", the italicized words denoting suffixes of condition. The Paonese sentence did not so much describe an act as it presented a picture of a situation. The language might be said to consist of nouns, suffixes, postpositions and temporal indexes. There were no verbs, no adjectives; no formal word comparison such as *good, better, best.*

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There were no words for "prestige," "integrity," "individuality," "honor," or "justice"; for the typical Paonese saw himself as a cork on a sea of a million waves, lofted, lowered, thrust aside by incomprehensible forces—if he thought of himself as a discrete personality at all. He was one of a uniform mass, a crowd of men distinguished only by the color, cut and weave of their clothes—highly significant symbols on Pao.

He held his ruler, the Panarch, in awe, but felt neither admiration, envy, loyalty nor reverence. He [illegible] ence and asked in return only [illegible] tinuity, for on Pao nothing must vary, nothing must change.

The Panarch occupied a paradoxical position. He ruled, he made decisions, he loomed over the population like a mountain over the plain, and for this reason excited fearful respect. The average man faced only the most trivial choices; ritual and precedent shaped his every act. He prospered and suffered with the mass of his fellows, and could not help but feel that a person who lived unsupported, who dealt death and bestowed life, must be a man apart, with ice in his veins and a special fire burning inside his skull.

But the Panarch, absolute tyrant though he might be, was also forced to conform. Here lay the paradox: the single inner-directed individual of Pao was basically no more free than the others. Like them, he must fit himself to the archetype established by his predecessors. As a unique individual he was allowed vices unthinkable and abhorrent to the average man.

The Panarch might indulge in profligate sexuality, capricious cruelty, a harsh and unyielding manner. So much was expected of the Panarch. But he might not appear gay or frivolous; he must hold himself aloof from friendship; he must show himself seldom in public places. Most important of all, he must never seem indecisive or uncertain. To do so would break the archetype.

II

PERGOLAI, an islet in the Helianse Sea between Minamand and Dronamand had been preempted and converted into an arcadian retreat by Panarch Aiello Panasper. Every trace of former habitancy had been removed; forests had been transplanted into the old paddies, wildflowers seeded, a stream diverted to form a chain of ponds. At the head of a meadow bordered by Paonese bamboo and tall myrrh trees stood Aiellos lodge, an airy structure of white glass, carved stone and polished wood.

The plan was simple: a residential tower, a service wing, and an octagonal pavilion with a pink marble dome. Here in the pavilion, at a carved ivory table, sat Aiello

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to his mid-day repast, wearing the Utter Black of his position. He was a large man, small-boned, well-fleshed. His silver-gray hair shone fine as a baby's; he had a baby's clear skin and wide unwinking stare. His mouth drooped, his eyebrows arched high, conveying a perpetual sense of sardonic and skeptical inquiry.

To the right sat his brother Bustamonte, bearing the title Ayudor —a smaller man, with a shock of coarse dark hair, quick black eyes, knobs of muscles in his cheeks. Aiello was cool and reflective; Bustamonte was energetic beyond the usual Paonese norm. He had toured two or three nearby worlds, returning with a number of alien enthusiasms which had gained him the dislike and distrust of the Paonese population.

On Aiello's other side sat his son, Beran Panasper, the Medallion. He was a thin child, hesitant and different, with fragile features and long black hair, resembling Aiello only in his clear skin and wide eyes.

Across the table sat a score of other men: functionaries of the government, petitioners, three commercial representatives from Mercantile, and a hawk-faced man in brown and gray who spoke to no one. With greater or less appetite they devoted themselves to food served in mother-of-pearl tureens by small sober-faced girls. Aiello was attended by special maids wearing long gowns striped with black and gold. Each dish served him was first tasted by Bustamonte—a custom residual from times when assassination was the rule rather than the exception.

Another manifestation of this ancient caution could be found in the three Mamarone standing vigilant behind Aiello. These were enormous creatures tattooed deadblack—neutraloids, with reservoirs of synthetic hormones in place of their procreative glands. They wore magnificent turbans of scarlet and gold-fringed pantaloons of the same colors, chest emblems of white silk and silver, and carried shields of refrax to be locked in front of the Panarch in the event of danger.

Aiello morosely nibbled and tasted his way through the prolonged meal and finally indicated that he was ready to conduct the business of the day. Young Beran was seldom allowed to witness state business, for Aiello disliked children and showed only small concern for the upbringing of his son. Recently the Ayudor Bustamonte had interested himself in Beran, talking for hours on end, until Beran's head grew heavy and his eyes drooped. They played odd games which bewildered Beran and left with him a peculiar uneasiness. And of late there had been blank spaces in his mind, lapses of memory.

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As Beran sat now at the ivory table in the pavilion, he held a small unfamiliar object in his hand. He could not recall where he had found it, but it seemed as if there were something he must do. He looked at his father, and felt a sudden hot panic. He gasped, clamped his teeth on his lower lip. He whispered feverishly to himself, *Why did I do that, why do I feel this way?* He found no answer. There was a roiling inside his head, a series of strains which left him dizzy. Bustamonte was looking at him, frowning.

Beran felt awkward and guilty. He made a great effort, pulled himself erect in his chair. He must watch and listen, as Bustamonte had instructed him. Someday he would be sitting in Aiello's chair, wearing splendid Black; and then how different things would be! The pompous band of ministers would go; he would send them bounding and fleeing with dogs at their heels, and the crabbed servants who tended him would be thrown into the sea. He would hold court in a gigantic pink and black balloon, swinging lazily over eight continents. Wherever he drifted there would be regattas and festivals and great crowds rejoicing.

Beran tasted a bit of toasted fish-tail, but as usual lacked appetite. He felt the brush of eyes; someone was watching him. Turning his head, he met the gaze of the hawk-faced stranger in brown and gray. The man had an arresting face, long and thin with a high forehead, a wisp of mustache, a nose like the prow of a ship. His hair was glossy black, thick and short as fur. His eyes were set deep; his gaze, dark and magnetic, awoke all of Beran's uneasiness. The object in his hand felt heavy and hot. He wanted to fling it down, but could not. His fingers refused to relax their grip. He sat sweating and miserable.

The first man to be heard was Sigil Paniche, business representative from Mercantile, the planet of a nearby sun. Paniche was a thin man, quick and clever, with copper-colored skin and burnished hair, which he wore wound into knobs and fastened with turquoise clasps.

He was a typical Mercantil, a salesman and trader, as essentially urban as the Paonese were people of soil and sea. His world sold to the entire cluster; Mercantil spacebarges roved everywhere, delivering machinery, vehicles, air-craft, communication equipment, tools, weapons, power-generators, returning to Mercantile with foodstuffs, luxury hand-crafts and whatever raw material might be cheaper to import than to synthesize.

Bustamonte whispered to Aiello, who shook his head. Bustamonte whispered more urgently; Aiello turned him a slow caustic side-

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glance. Bustamonte sat back sullenly.

At a signal from Aiello, the captain of the Mamarone guard addressed the table in his soft scraped-steel voice. "By the Panarch's order, and because a matter of great urgency has arisen, all of the ordinary petitioners will depart. They will be heard at a later hour."

Chairs slid softly on the marble floor. The ministers arose, spread their arms in the Paonese gesture of respect, and departed.

Across the table, only Sigil Paniche, his two aides, and the stranger in brown and gray remained.

The Mercantil moved to a chair opposite Aiello; he bowed, seated himself, his aides coming to stand at his back.

Panarch Aiello spoke an offhand greeting; the Mercantil responded in broken Paonese.

Aiello toyed with a bowl of brandied fruit, appraising the Mercantil. "Pao and Mercantile have traded for many centuries, Sigil Paniche."

The Mercantil bowed. "We fulfill the exact letter of our contracts; this is our creed."

Aiello laughed shortly; the Mercantil looked at him in surprise, but said nothing.

"Trade with Pao has enriched you," mused Aiello.

"We trade with twenty-eight worlds, Supremacy."

Aiello leaned back in his chair. "There are two matters I wish to discuss with you. You have just heard our need for water on Impland. We require an installation to demineralize an appropriate quantity of ocean-water. You may refer this matter to your engineers."

"I am at your orders, sir."

Aiello spoke in a level emotionless voice, almost casual. "We have ordered from you, and you have delivered, large quantities of military equipment."

Sigil Paniche bowed agreement. With no outward sign or change he suddenly seemed uneasy. "Exactly, sir. We fulfilled the exact requirements of your order."

"I cannot agree with you," Aiello responded.

Sigil Paniche became stiff; his words were even more formal than before. "I assure your Supremacy that I personally checked delivery. The equipment was exactly as described in order and invoice."

Aiello went on in his coldest tones. "You delivered sixty-four barrage monitors, five hundred and twelve patrol flitters, a large number of multiple resonators, energetics, wasps and hand-weapons. These accord with the original order."

"Exactly, sir."

"However, you knew the purpose behind this order."

Sigil Paniche bowed his copper-bright head. "You refer to conditions on the planet Batmarsh."

"Just so. The Dolberg dynasty

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has been eliminated. A new dynasty, the Brumbos, have assumed power. New Batch rulers customarily undertake military ventures."

"Such is the tradition," agreed the Mercantil. "They are a flamboyant race."

"You have supplied these adventurers with armament."

Sigil Paniche once again agreed. "We sell to any who will buy; we have done so for many years; you must not reproach us for this."

Aiello raised his eyebrows. "I do not do so. I reproach you for selling us standard models while offering the Brumbo Clan equipment against which you guarantee we will be powerless."

Sigil Paniche blinked. "What is the source of your information?"

"Must I divest myself of every secret?" inquired Aiello, curling his lip.

"No, no," exclaimed Paniche. "Your allegations, however, seem mistaken. Our policy is absolute neutrality."

"Unless you can profit by double-dealing."

Sigil Paniche drew himself erect. "Supremacy, I am official representative of Mercantile on Pao. Your statements to me, therefore, must be regarded as formal insults."

Aiello appeared to be faintly surprised. "Insult a Mercantil? Preposterous!"

Sigil Paniche's skin burnt vermilion. He twisted angrily in his seat.

Bustamonte whispered in Aiello's ear. Aiello shrugged, turned back to the Mercantil. His voice was cool, his words carefully measured. "For the reasons I have stated, I declare that the Mercantil contract has not been fulfilled. The merchandise will not perform its function. We will not pay."

Sigil Paniche's most acute nerve was touched. "The delivered articles meet the contractual specifications!" By his lights nothing more need be said.

"But they are useless to our need, a fact known on Mercantile."

Sigil Paniche's eyes gleamed. "No doubt your Supremacy has considered the long-range effects of such a decision."

Aiello nodded. "I direct your attention to the gentleman at your left hand."

All eyes swung to the stranger in brown and gray. Sigil Paniche stared the hardest of all. "Who is this man?" he asked sharply. "I do not recognize his clothes."

Aiello was served a bowl of green syrup by one of the black and gold-clad maidens. Bustamonte dutifully sampled a spoonful. Aiello drew the bowl close to him sipped. "This is Lord Palafox. He is here to offer us advice. If we cannot rely upon Mercantile for protection we must seek elsewhere."

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Sigil Paniche surveyed the stranger with cold hostility. His aides muttered to each other. Bustamonte sat slumped into his seat, as if disassociating himself from whatever understanding existed between Aiello and the stranger.

Paniche motioned to one of his subordinates, who advanced reluctantly. "I must point out that the products of Mercantile are surpassed nowhere. Allow me to display one of our new developments." The counsellor handed him a case, from which Paniche withdrew a pair of small transparent hemispheres.

The neutraloid body-guards, at the sight of the case, had leapt in front of Aiello with thier refrax shields; Sigil Paniche grimaced painfully. "No need for alarm; there is no danger here," he said.

He displayed the hemispheres to Aiello, then placed them over his eyes. "Our new optidynes! They function either as microscope or telescope! The enormous range of their power is controlled by the ocular muscles and the eyelids. Truly marvellous! For instance—" he turned, looked out the window of the pavilion "—I see quartz crystals in the stones of the sea-wall. A gray chit stands under that far funella bush." He turned his gaze to his sleeve. "I see the threads, the fibers of the threads, the laminae of the fibers."

He looked at Bustamonte. "I note the pores of the Ayudor's estimable nose. I observe several hairs in his nostril." He glanced at the Medallion, carefully avoiding the solecism of staring at Aiello. "The brave lad is excited; I count his pulse: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, eleven, twelve, thirteen. . . .

"He holds a tiny object between his fingers, no larger than a pill." He turned, inspected the man in gray. "I see—" he stared; then with a sudden gesture, removed the optidynes from his eyes.

"What did you see?" Bustamonte inquired.

Sigil Paniche studied the tall man in perturbation and awe. "I saw his sign. The tattoo of a Breakness wizard!"

The words seemed to arouse Bustamonte. He glared in accusation at Aiello; gave Palafox a look of loathing, then glowered down at the carved ivory of the table.

"You are correct," said Aiello. "This is Lord Palafox, Dominie of Breakness Institute."

Sigil Paniche bowed his head frigidly. "Will your Supremacy allow me a question?"

"Ask what you will."

"What does Lord Palafox do here on Pao?"

Aiello said blandly, "He came at my behest. I need expert advice. Certain of my confidants—" he glanced rather contemptuously toward Bustamonte "—feel that we

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can buy Mercantil cooperation. He believes that for a price you will betray the Brumbos of Batmarsh in the same way you have already betrayed us."

Sigil Paniche said in a brittle voice, "We deal in all types of merchandise. We can be engaged for special research."

Aiello twisted his pink mouth into a sneer of repugnance. "I would rather deal with Lord Palafox."

Paniche could hardly contain his anger. "Why are you telling me this?"

"I would not have your syndics think that their treachery goes unnoticed."

Sigil Paniche made a great effort. "I urge you to reconsider. In no way have we cheated you. We delivered exactly what was ordered. Mercantile has served you well in the past; we hope to serve you in the future. If you deal with Breakness, think exactly what the bargain entails!"

"I have made no bargains with Lord Palafox," said Aiello, with a swift glance toward the man in brown and gray.

"Ah, but you will—and, if I may speak openly—" he waited.

"Speak," said Aiello.

"—to your eventual dismay." He became emboldened. "Never forget, Supremacy, that they build no weapons on Breakness; they make no application of their science." He looked to Palafox. "Is this not true?"

"Not altogether," replied Palafox. "A Dominie of the Institute is never without his weapons."

"And does Breakness manufacture weapons for export?" Paniche persisted.

"No," answered Palafox with a slight smile. "It is well-known that we manufacture only knowledge and men."

Sigil Paniche turned to Aiello. "Only weapons can guard you against the fury of the Brumbos. Why not examine, at least, some of our new products?"

"This can do no harm," Bustamonte urged. "And perhaps we will not require Palafox after all."

Aiello turned him a peevish glance, but Sigil Paniche already was displaying a globe-shaped projector with a hand grip. "This is one of our most ingenious developments."

The Medallion Beran, watching in absorption, felt a sudden quiver, a pang of indescribable alarm. *Why? How? What?* He half-raised in his seat, then, turning his head, met Bustamonte's eyes. They were bright with meaning. Beran's mind filled with dread. He must leave the pavilion, he must go! But he could not move from his seat. He bowed his head, whispered under his breath, waited.

Paniche was directing his tool toward the pink marble dome. "Observe, if you will." The top

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half of the room went black, as if concealed by a black shutter, as if snatched from existence. "The device seeks out, attracts and absorbs energy of the visual phase," explained the Mercantil. "It is invaluable for the confusion of an adversary."

Beran turned his head, looked helplessly toward Bustamonte.

Bustamonte's face was expressionless.

"Now notice!" cried Sigil Paniche enthusiastically. "I turn this knob here—" he turned the knob; the room was blotted out entirely.

Bustamonte's cough was the only sound to be heard.

Then there was a hiss of surprise, a rustle of movement, a choking sound.

Light returned to the pavilion. A great horrified gasp sounded; all eyes went to the Panarch. He lay back into his pink silk divan. His leg jerked up, kicked, set dishes and flagons on the table rattling.

"Help, doctor!" cried Bustamonte. "To the Panarch!"

Aiello's fists beat a spasmodic tattoo on the table-top. His eyes went dim, his head fell forward in the complete lassitude of death.

The doctors gingerly examined Aiello, a gross hulk with arms and legs sprawled in four directions. The Mercantil stood in a taut group, muttering to each other. Palafox, who had not moved from his seat at the table, watched with completely impassive features.

Bustamonte, now Ayudor-Senior, lost no time in asserting the authority which, as regent for the new Panarch, he might be expected to employ. He waved his hand; a squad of Mamarone leapt to stations surrounding the pavilion.

"None will leave," declared Bustamonte, "until these tragic circumstances are clarified." He turned to the doctors. "Have you determined the cause of death?"

The first of the three doctors bowed. "The Panarch succumbed to poison. It was administered by a sting-missile, thrust into the left side of his throat. The poison . . ." He consulted the dials, the shadowgraphs and color-wheels of an analyzer into which his colleagues had inserted samples of Aiello's body-fluids. "The poison appears to be a mepothanax derivative, extin most probably."

"In that case," spoke Bustamonte, and his gaze swung from the huddle of Mercantil traders to the grave Lord Palafox, "the crime was committed by someone in this room."

Sigil Paniche diffidently approached the corpse. "Allow me to examine this sting."

The chief doctor indicated a metal plate. Here rested the black sting with its small white bulb.

Sigil Paniche's face was strained into taut cords. "This object is that which I glimpsed in the hand of

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the Medallion, no more than a few moments ago."

Bustamonte succumbed to rage. His jowls went pink, his eyes swam with fire. "This accusation from you—a Mercantil swindler!—is a horror of impertinence, an epic of cruelty! You accuse the lad of killing his father?"

Beran began to whimper; his head wobbled from side to side. "Quiet," hissed Bustamonte. "The nature of the deed is clear!"

"No, no," protested Sigil Paniche, and all the Mercantil stood blanched and helpless, too stunned to act in unison.

"There is no room for doubt," Bustamonte stated inexorably. "You came to Pergolai aware that your duplicity had been discovered. You were resolved to evade the penalties."

"This is nonsense!" cried the Mercantil. "How could we plan so idiotic an act?"

Bustamonte ignored the protest. In a voice of thunder he continued. "The Panarch would not be mollified. So you hid yourself in darkness, and killed the great leader of the Paonese!"

"No, no!"

"But you will derive no benefit from the crime! I, Bustamonte, am even less placable than Aiello! As my first act I pronounce judgment upon you."

Bustamonte held up his arm, palm outward, fingers clenched over thumb—the traditional death-signal of the Paonese. He called to the commander of the Mamarone. "Subaqueate these creatures!" He glanced into the sky; the sun was low. "Make haste, before sundown!"

Hurriedly, for a Paonese superstition forbade killing during the hours of darkness, the Mamarone carried the traders to a cliff overlooking an arm of the sea. Their feet were thrust into ballasted tubes, they were flung out through the air. They struck the water, sank, and the surface was calm as before.

Twenty minutes later, by order of Bustamonte, the body of Aiello was brought forth. Without ceremony it was weighted and cast after the Mercantil. Once again the sea showed a quick white blossom of foam; once again it rolled quiet and blue.

III

THE SUN hovered at the rim of the sea. Bustamonte, Ayudor-Senior of Pao, walked with nervously energetic steps along the terrace.

Lord Palafox sat nearby. At each end of the terrace stood a Mamarone, fire-sting aimed steadily at Palafox, to thwart any possible act of violence.

Bustamonte stopped short in front of Palafox. "My decision was wise; I have no doubt of it!"

"What decision is this?"

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"In connection with the Mercantil."

Palafox considered. "You may now find trade relations difficult."

"Pah! What do they care for the lives of three men so long as there is profit to be obtained?"

"Very little, doubtless."

"These men were cheats and swindlers. They deserved no more than they received."

"In addition," Palafox pointed out, "the crime has been followed by an appropriate penalty, with no lack of equilibrium to disturb the public."

"Justice has been done," said Bustamonte stiffly.

Palafox nodded. "The function of justice, after all, is to dissuade any who might wish to perform a like misdeed. The execution constitutes such a dissuasion."

Bustamonte swung on his heel, paced up and down the terrace. "It is true that I acted partly from considerations of expediency."

Palafox said nothing.

"In all candor," said Bustamonte, "I admit that the evidence points to another hand in the affair. The major element of the difficulty remains, like the bulk of an iceberg."

"What difficulty is this?"

"How shall I deal with young Beran?"

Palafox stroked his lean chin. "The question must be considered in its proper perspective."

"I fail to understand you."

"We must ask ourselves, did Beran actually kill the Panarch?"

Protruding his lips, bulging his eyes, Bustamonte contrived to become a grotesque hybrid of ape and frog. "Undoubtedly!"

"Why should he do so?"

Bustamonte shrugged. "Aiello had no love for Beran. It is doubtful if the child were actually fathered by Aiello."

"Indeed?" mused Lord Palafox. "And who might be the father?"

Bustamonte shrugged once more. "The Divine Petraia was not altogether fastidious in regard to her lovers. We will never know the truth, since a year ago Aiello ordained her subaqueation. Beran was grief-stricken, and here might be the source of the crime."

"Surely you do not take me for a fool?" Palafox asked, smiling a peculiar fixed smile.

Bustamonte looked at him in startlement. "Eh? What's this?"

"The execution of this deed was precise. The child appeared to be acting under hypnotic compulsion. His hand was guided by another brain."

"You feel so?" Bustamonte frowned. "Who might such 'another' be?"

"Why not the Panarch's brother?"

Bustamonte halted in his pacing, then laughed shortly. "This is fantasy indeed! What of yourself?

"I gain nothing from Aiello's death," said Palafox. "He asked

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me here to a specific purpose; now he is dead, and your own policy faces a different direction. There is no further need for me."

Bustamonte held up his hand. "Not so fast. Today is not yesterday. The Mercantil, as you suggest, may prove hard to deal with. Perhaps you will serve me as you might have served Aiello."

Palafox rose to his feet. The sun was settling past the far horizon into the sea; it swam orange and distorted in the thick air. A breeze tinkled among glass bells and drew flute-sounds from an aeolean harp. The sun flattened, halved, quartered.

"Watch now!" said Palafox. "Watch for the green flash!"

The last fiery bar of red sank below the horizon; then came a flickering shaft of pure green, changing to blue, and the sunlight was gone.

The two men were silent, watching the afterglow. Bustamonte spoke in a heavy voice, "Beran must die. The fact of patricide is clear."

"You over-react to the situation," observed Palafox mildly. "Your remedies are worse than the ailment."

"I act as I think necessary," snapped Bustamonte.

"I will relieve you of the child," said Palafox. "He may return with me to Breakness."

Bustamonte inspected Palafox with simulated surprise. "What will you do with young Beran? The idea is ridiculous. I am prepared to offer you a draft of females to augment your prestige, or for whatever peculiar purpose you require these female herds."

"Our purposes are hardly peculiar."

"Well," Bustamonte shrugged, "we will discuss this later. But now I give orders in regard to Beran."

Palafox looked away into the dusk, smiling. "You fear that Beran will become a weapon against you. You want no possible challenge."

Bustamonte's round face twisted into a cunning leer. "It would be banal to deny it."

Palafox stared into the sky. "You need not fear him. He would remember nothing."

"What is your interest in this child?" demanded Bustamonte.

"Consider it a whim."

Bustamonte was curt. "I must disoblige you."

"I make a better friend than enemy," Palafox said softly.

The audio news instrument on the wall had been turned on, and hardly had Palafox spoken when a voice interrupted them—a voice thick with synthetic emotion. "Pao, grieve! All Pao, mourn! The great Aiello, our noble Panarch is gone! Dole, dole, dole! Bewildered we search the sad sky, and our hope, our only sustention in this tragic hour is Beran, the brave new Panarch! Only let his reign prove

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as static and glorious as that of great Aiello!"

Bustamonte swung upon Palafox like a small black bull. "How did the news get abroad?"

Palafox replied with easy carelessness. "I myself released it."

Bustamonte's eyes glittered. "When did you do this? You have been under constant surveillance."

"We Breakness dominie," said Palafox, "are not without subterfuge."

The voice from the wall droned on. "Acting under the orders of Panarch Beran, the Mamarone have efficiently subaqueated the responsible criminals. Ayudor Bustamonte is serving Beran with whole-hearted loyalty, and will help maintain equilibrium."

Bustamonte's fury seethed to the surface. "Do you think you can thwart me by such a trick?" He signalled the Mamorone. "You wished to join Beran; so you shall—in life and, at tomorrow's first light, in death."

The guards were at Palafox's back. "Search this man!" cried Bustamonte. "Inspect him with care!"

The guards subjected Palafox to a most minute scrutiny. Every stitch of his clothes was examined, he was patted and prodded with complete lack of regard for dignity.

Nothing was discovered; no tool, weapon or instrument of any kind.

Bustamonte laughed coarsely. He motioned to the guards. "Take him to confinement."

The neutraloids seized Palafox's arms.

"One final word," said Palafox, "for you will not see me again on Pao."

Bustamonte agreed. "Of this I am sure."

"I came at Aiello's wish to negotiate a contract."

"A dastardly mission!" Bustamonte exclaimed. "A bargain in flesh, a traffic in lechery."

"Rather an exchange of surpluses to satisfy each of our needs," said Palafox. "My wisdom for your population. It is a sensible offer."

"I have no time for abstruseness." Bustamonte motioned to the guards. They urged Palafox toward the door.

"Allow me my say," spoke Palafox gently. The guards paid him no heed. Palafox made a small twitch; the neutraloids cried out and sprang away from him.

"What's this?" cried Bustamonte, jumping to his feet.

"He burns! He radiates fire!"

Palafox spoke in his quiet voice, "As I say, we will not meet again on Pao. But you will need me, and Aiello's bargain will seem very reasonable. And then you must come to Breakness." He bowed to Bustamonte, turned to the guards. "Come, now we will go."

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BERAN sat with his chin on the window sill, looking out into the night. The surf phosphoresced on the beach, the stars hung in great frosty clots. Nothing else could be seen.

There was a sound at the door. The lock whirred, the door slid back. In the opening stood two neutraloids, and, between them, Lord Palafox.

Beran came hopefully forward —but the attitudes of the three halted him. The neutraloids shoved Palafox forward. The door whirred shut. Beran stood in the center of the room, crestfallen and dejected.

Palafox glanced around the room, seeming instantly to appraise every detail. He put his ear to the door, listened, then took three long elastic strides to the window. He looked out. Nothing to be seen, only stars and surf and darkly looming rocks.

Beran came a step or two closer to him. Palafox bent to his ear, whispered, "We're in danger. Whatever we say is heard. Don't talk, just watch me—and move quickly when I give the signal!"

Beran nodded. Palafox made a second inspection of the room, rather more slowly than before. As he went about his survey, a section of the door became transparent and an eye peered through.

In sudden annoyance Palafox raised his hand, then restrained himself. After a moment the eye disappeared, the wall became once more opaque.

Palafox sprang to the window; he pointed his forefinger. A needle of incandescence darted forth, cutting a hissing slot through the frame. The window fell loose, and before Palafox could catch it, disappeared into the darkness.

Palafox hissed under his breath. "Over here now!" he muttered. "Quick!" Beran hesitated. "Quick!" hissed Palafox. "Do you want to live? Up on my back, quick!"

From below came the thud of feet, voices growing louder.

A moment later the door slid back; three Mamarone stood in the doorway. They stopped, stared all around, then ran to the open window.

The captain turned. "Below, to the grounds! It's deep water for all if they have escaped!"

When they searched the gardens they found no trace of Palafox or Beran. Standing in the starlight, darker than the darkness, they argued in their soft voices, and presently reached a decision. Their voices ceased; they themselves slid away through the night.

IV

Any collocation of persons, no matter how numerous, how scant, how even their homogeneity, how firmly they profess common doctrine, will presently reveal themselves to consist of smaller groups

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espousing variant versions of the common creed; and these sub-groups will manifest sub-sub-groups, and so to the final limit of the single individual, and even in this single person conflicting tendencies will express themselves.

ADAM OSTWALD: *Human Society.*

The Paonese, in spite of their fifteen billion, comprised as undifferentiated a group as could be found in the human universe. Nevertheless, to the Paonese the traits in common were taken for granted and only the distinctions, minuscule though they were, attracted attention.

In this fashion the people of Minamand, and especially those in the capital city of Eiljanre, were held to be urbane and frivolous. Hivand, flattest and most featureless of the continents, exemplified bucolic naivete. The people of Nonamand, the bleak continent to the south, bore the reputation of dour thrift and fortitude, while the inhabitants of Vidamand, who grew grapes and fruits, and bottled almost all the wine of Pao, were considered large-hearted and expansive.

Bustamonte for many years had maintained a staff of secret informants, stationed through the eight continents. Early in the morning, walking the airy gallery of the Pergolai lodge, he was beset by worry. Events were not proceeding at their optimum. Only three of the eight continents seemed to be accepting him as *de facto* Panarch. These were Vidamand, Minamand and Dronomand. From Aimand, Shraimand, Nonomand, Hivand and Impland, his agents reported a growing tide of recalcitrance.

There was no suggestion of active rebellion, no parades or public meetings. Paonese dissatisfaction expressed itself in surliness, a work-slowdown throughout the public services, dwindling cooperation with the civil service. It was a situation which in the past had led to a breakdown of the economy and a change of dynasty.

Bustamonte cracked his knuckles nervously as he considered his position. At the moment he had no choice; his area of maneuver had been cut away. He was committed to a course of action; he must carry it through. The Medallion must die, and likewise the Breakness Wizard.

Daylight had come; now they could properly be executed.

He descended to the main floor, signalled to one of the Mamarone. "Summon Captain Mornune."

Several minutes passed. The neutraloid returned.

"Where is Mornune?" demanded Bustamonte.

"Captain Mornune and two of the platoon have departed Pergolai."

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Bustamonte wheeled around, dumbfounded. "Departed Pergolai?"

"This is my information."

Bustamonte glared at the guard, then looked toward the tower. "Come along!" He charged for the lift; the two were whisked high. Bustamonte marched down the corridor, to the confinement chamber. He peered through the spy-hole, looked all around the room. Then he furiously slid aside the door, crossed to the open window.

"It is all clear now," he ranted. "Beran is gone. The Dominie is gone. Both are fled to Eiljanre. There will be trouble."

He went to the window, stood looking out into the darkness. Finally he turned. "Your name is Andrade?"

"Hessenden Andrade."

"You are now Captain Andrade, in the place of Mornune."

"Very well."

"We return to Eiljanre. Make the necessary arrangements."

Bustamonte descended to the terrace, seated himself with a glass of brandy. His plans, so long in preparation, were wrecked. Palafox clearly intended Beran to become Panarch. The Paonese loved a young Panarch and were happy only with the smooth progression of the dynasty; anything else disturbed their need for timeless continuity. Beran need only appear at Eiljanre, to be led triumphantly to the Great Palace, and arrayed in Utter Black.

Bustamonte took a great gulp of brandy. Well then, he had failed. Aiello was dead; he could never demonstrate that Beran's hand had placed the fatal sting. Indeed, had he not already executed three Mercantil traders for the very crime?

What to do? Actually he had no choice. He could only proceed to Eiljanre and hope to establish himself as Ayudor Senior, regent for Beran. Unless guided too firmly by Palafox, Beran would probably overlook his imprisonment; and if Palafox were intransigent there were ways of dealing with him.

In the hours and days that followed, Bustamonte was to encounter three surprises of increasing magnitude.

The first was the discovery that neither Palafox nor Beran had arrived at Eiljanre, nor did they appear elsewhere on Pao. The second concerned the Mercantil Ambassador. The Ambassador delivered Bustamonte a statement which first excoriated the Paonese government for the summary execution of the three trade attachés, broke off all trade relations until indemnification was paid, and set forth the required indemnification—a sum which seemed ridiculously large to a Paonese ruler, who every day in the course of his duties might ordain

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death for a hundred thousand persons.

Bustamonte had been hoping to negotiate a new armanent contract. As he had advised Aiello, he offered a premium for sole rights to the most advanced weapons. The note from the Mercantil Ambassador destroyed all hope of a new agreement.

The third shock was the most devastating of all, and indeed reduced the first two to the proportion of incidents.

The Brumbo Clan of Batmarsh, elevated to primacy over a score of restless competitors, needed a glory-earning coup to cement its position. Eban Buzbek, Hetman of the Brumbos, therefore gathered a hundred ships, loaded them with warriors and set forth against the great world Pao.

Perhaps he had only intended a foray: a landing, a vast orgiastic assault, a quick garnering of booty, and departure—but passing the outer ring of monitors he met only token resistance, and landing on Vidamand, the most disaffected continent, none at all. This was success of the wildest description!

Eban Buzbek took his ten thousand men to Donaspara, first city of Shraimand; and there was no one to dispute him. Six days after he landed on Pao he entered Eiljanre. The populace watched him and his glory-flushed army with sullen eyes; none made any resistance, even when their property was taken and their women raped. Warfare, even hit-and-run guerilla tactics, were not in the Paonese character. They had relied on the Mamarone for protection, but Bustamonte had prudently departed the capital; there had been confusion and disorganization, and the Mamarone, although completely fearless, lacked initiative and were never called into action.

In any event only a small percentage of the population was touched by the Batch conquest; the others thought their deep slow thoughts and the rhythm of Paonese life proceeded much as before.

SITTING ON Palafox's shoulders, stepping out through the window into the night, Beran felt as if he were living a nightmare. A sudden weightlessness—they were falling! His stomach contracted, the breath rose in his throat. He squirmed and cried out in fear. Falling, falling, falling; when would they strike?

"Quiet," said Palafox shortly.

Beran's eyes focused. He blinked. A lighted window moved past his vision. It passed below; they were not falling; they were rising! They were above the tower, above the pavilion! Up into the night they drifted, light as bubbles, up above the tower, up into the star-bright sky. Presently

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he convinced himself that he was not dreaming; it was therefore through the magic of the Breakness wizard that they wafted through the middle-air, light as thistle-down. As his wonder grew, his fear lessened, and he peered into Palafox's face.

"Where are we going?" he asked.

"Up to where I anchored my ship."

Beran looked wistfully down to the pavilion. It glowed in many colors, like a sea-anemone. He had no wish to return; there was only a vague regret. His eyes flooded with tears; he lapsed into a state of apathy, hardly caring what happened to him.

Up into the sky they floated, for fifteen quiet minutes, and the pavilion became a colored blot far below.

Palafox held out his left hand; impulses from the radar-mesh in his palm were reflected back from the ground, converted into stimulus. High enough. Palafox touched his tongue to one of the plates in the tissue of his cheek, spoke a sharp syllable.

Moments passed; Palafox and Beran floated like wraiths. Then a long shape came to blot out the sky. Palafox reached, caught a hand-rail, swung himself and Beran along a hull to an entrance hatch. He pushed Beran into a staging chamber, followed and closed the hatch.

Interior lights glowed overhead.

Beran, too dazed to take an interest in events, sagged upon a bench. He watched Palafox mount to a raised deck, flick at a pair of keys. The sky went dull, and Beran was caught in the pulse of sub-space motion.

Palafox came down from the platform, inspected Beran with dispassionate appraisal. Beran could not meet his gaze.

"Where are we going?" asked Beran, not because he cared, but because he could think of nothing better to say.

"To Breakness."

Beran's heart took a queer jump. "Why must I go?"

"Because now you are Panarch. If you remained on Pao, Bustamonte would kill you."

Beran recognized the truth of the statement. He felt bleak, lost, forlorn. He knew nothing of Breakness, except what had been conveyed by the attitudes and voice-tones of others. The image so formed in his mind was not reassuring.

He stole a look at Palafox—a man far different from the quiet stranger at Aiello's table. This Palafox was tall as a fire-demon, magnificent with pent energy. A wizard, a Breakness wizard!

Palafox glanced down at Beran. "How old are you, boy?" he asked.

"Nine years old."

Palafox rubbed his long chin.

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"It is best that you learn what is to be expected of you. In essence, the program is uncomplicated. You will live on Breakness, you shall attend the Institute, you shall be my ward, and the time will come when you serve me as one of my own sons."

"Are your sons my age? Beran asked hopefully.

"I have many sons!" said Palafox with grim pride. "I count them by the hundreds!" Becoming aware of Beran's bemused attention, he laughed humorlessly. "There is much here that you do not understand . . . Why do you stare?"

Beran said apologetically, "If you have so many children you must be old, much older than you look."

Palafox's face underwent a peculiar change. The cheeks suffused with red, the eyes glittered like bits of glass. His voice was slow, icy cold. "I am not old. Never make such a remark again. It is an ill thing to say to a Breakness dominie!"

"I'm sorry!" quavered Beran. "I thought—"

"No matter. Come, you are tired, you shall sleep."

Beran listlessly rose to his feet.

Palafox, displaying neither kindliness nor severity, lifted him into a bunk. Heat rays warmed Beran's skin; turning his face to the dark-blue bulkhead, he fell asleep.

Beran awoke in puzzlement to find himself not in his pink and black bed. After contemplating his position, he felt relatively cheerful. The future promised to be interesting, and when he returned to Pao he would be equipped with all the secret lore of Breakness.

He rose from the bunk, shared breakfast with Palafox who seemed to be in high spirits. Beran took sufficient courage to put a few further inquiries.

"Are you actually a wizard?" he asked.

"I can perform no miracles," said Palafox, "except perhaps those of the mind."

"But you walk on air! You shoot fire from your finger!"

"As does any other Breakness dominie."

Beran looked wonderingly at the long keen visage. "Then you are all wizards?"

"Bah!" exclaimed Palafox. "These powers are the result of bodily modification. I am highly modified."

Beran's awe became tinged with doubt. "The Mamarone are modified, but—"

Palafox grinned down at Beran like a wolf. "This is the least apt comparison. Can neutraloids walk on air?"

"No."

"We are not neutraloids," said Palafox decisively. "Our modifications enhance rather than elimi-

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nate our powers. Anti-gravity web is meshed into the skin of my feet. Radar in my left hand, at the back of my neck, in my forehead provides me with a sixth sense. I can see three colors below the red and four over the violet. I can hear radio waves. I can walk under water. I can float in space. Instead of bone in my forefinger, I carry a projection tube. I have a number of other powers, all drawing energy from a pack fitted into my chest."

Beran was silent for a moment. Then he asked diffidently, "When I come to Breakness, will I be modified too?"

Palafox considered Beran as if in the light of a new idea. "If you do exactly as I say you must do."

Beran turned his head to avoid Palafox's gaze. "What must I do?" he asked in a restrained voice.

"For the present, you need not concern yourself."

Beran went to the port and looked out, but nothing could be seen but speed-striations of gray and black.

"How long before we reach Breakness?" he asked.

"Not so very long . . . Come away from the port. Looking into sub-space can harm a susceptible brain."

Indicators on the control panel vibrated and fluttered; the space-boat gave a quick lurch.

Palafox stepped up to look from the observation dome. "Here is Breakness!"

Beran, standing on his tiptoes, saw a gray world, and behind, a small white sun. The space-boat whistled down into the atmosphere, and the world grew large.

Beran glimpsed mountains enormous beyond imagination: claws of rock forty miles high trailing plumes of vapor, rimed by ice and snow. The boat slipped across a gray-green ocean, mottled by clumps of floating weed, then once more rode over the crags.

The boat, now moving slowly, dipped into a vast valley with rock-slab walls and a bottom hidden by haze and murk. Ahead a rocky slope, wide as a prairie, showed a trifle of gray-white crust. The boat approached, and the crust became a small city clinging to the shoulder of the mountain-side. The buildings were low, constructed of rock-melt with roofs of russet brown; some of them joined and hung down the crag like a chain. The effect was bleak and not at all imposing.

"Is that Breakness?" asked Beran.

"That is Breakness Institute," said Palafox.

Beran was vaguely disappointed. "I had expected something different."

"We make no pretensions," Palafox remarked. "There are, after all, a very few dominie. And

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we see very little of each other."

Beran started to speak, then hesitated, sensing that he was touching upon a sensitive subject. In a cautious voice he asked, "Do your sons all live with you?"

"No," said Palafox shortly. "They attend the Institute, naturally."

The boat sank slowly; the indicators on the control board fluttered and jumped as if alive.

Beran, looking across the chasm, remembered the verdant landscape and blue seas of his homeland with a pang. "When will I go back to Pao?" he asked in sudden anxiety.

Palafox, his mind on other matters, answered off-handedly. "As soon as conditions warrant."

"But when will that be?"

Palafox looked swiftly down at him. "Do you want to be Panarch of Pao?"

"Yes," said Beran decidedly. "If I could be modified."

"Perhaps you may be granted these wishes. But you must never forget that he who gets must give."

"What must I give?"

"We will discuss this matter later."

"Bustamonte will not welcome me," said Beran gloomily. "I think he wants to be Panarch too."

Palafox laughed. "Bustamonte is having his troubles. Rejoice that Bustamonte must cope with them and not you."

V

BUSTAMONTE'S troubles were large. His dreams of grandeur were exploded. Instead of ruling the eight continents of Pao and holding court at Eiljanre his retinue consisted of a dozen Mamarone, three of his least desirable concubines, and a dozen disgruntled officials of magisterial rank. His realm was a remote village on the rain-swept moors of Nonamand; his palace a tavern. He enjoyed these prerogatives only on the sufferance of the Brumbos who, liking the fruits of their conquest, felt no great urge to seek out and destroy Bustamonte and his ministers.

A month passed. Bustamonte's temper grew short. He beat the concubines, berated his followers. The shepherds of the region took to avoiding the village; the innkeeper and the villagers every day became more taciturn, until one morning Bustamonte awoke to find the village deserted, the moors desolate of flocks.

He had hardly blinked sleep from his eyes when there was a sound from outside, a faint chorus of yells, a wild *rip-rip-rip*.

Bustamonte's heart sank, his jaw sagged. This was the hunting chivvy of the Brumbos, the clan call. The yelling and *rip-rip-rip* grew keener, and finally came down the single street of the village. Bustamonte wrapped a cloak

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about his stocky frame, went to the door, flung it open, stepped out upon the cobbles.

Down the road from the moors came his ministers at a staggering lope. Above, a dozen warriors of the Brumbo Clan rode air-scooters, cavorting, whooping and shouting, herding the ministers like sheep. At the sight of Bustamonte they screamed in triumph, swung down, grounded their air-scooters, sprang forward, each anxious to be first to lay hands on the nape of Bustamonte's neck and force him to his knees.

He was taken to a morning room overlooking the famous palace florarium. Here Eban Buzbek waited with a group of his clansmen and a Mercantil interpreter. He seemed in the best of spirits, and nodded jovially when Bustamonte appeared. He spoke a few words in the staccato language of Batmarsh; the Mercantil translated.

"Eban Buzbek hopes you have passed a restful night."

"What does he want of me?" growled Bustamonte.

The message was translated. Eban Buzbek replied at considerable length. The Mercantil listened attentively, then turned to Bustamonte.

"Eban Buzbek returns to Batmarsh. He says the Paonese are sullen and stubborn. They refuse to cooperate as a defeated people should."

The news came as no surprise to Bustamonte.

"Eban Buzbek is disappointed in Pao. He says the people are turtles, in that they will neither fight nor obey. He takes no satisfaction in his conquest."

Bustamonte glowered at the pig-tailed clansman slouching in the Black chair.

"Eban Buzbek departs and leaves you as Panarch of Pao. For this favor you must pay one million marks each Paonese month for the duration of your reign. Do you agree to the arrangement?"

Bustamonte looked from face to face. No one looked at him directly; the expressions were empty. But each warrior seemed peculiarly taut, like runners crouched at the start of a race.

"Do you agree to the arrangement?" the Mercantil repeated.

"Yes," muttered Bustamonte.

There was an imperceptible rustle of motion around the room; a regretful relaxation.

An hour later, Buzbek's red and black corvette knifed up and away; before the day's end no single clansman remained on Pao.

With a tremendous effort Bustamonte asserted his dignity, and assumed the title and authority of Panarch. His fifteen billion subjects, diverted by the Batch invasion, showed no further recalcitrance, and in this respect Bustamonte profited from the incursion.

Life proceeded at the usual

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timeless tempo. Only Bustamonte, who now must pay a monthly tribute, had cause to remember Eban Buzbek, Hetman of the Batmarsh Brumbos.

BERAN'S first weeks on Breakness were dismal and unhappy. There was no variety, inside or out; all was rock-color, in varying tones and intensities, and the look of distance. The wind roared incessantly, but the air was thin and the effort of breathing left an acrid burn in Beran's throat. Like a small pale house-sprite, he wandered the chilly corridors of Palafox's mansion, hoping for diversion, but finding little.

The typical residence of a Breakness Dominie, Palafox's house hung down the slope on the spine of an escalator. At the top were workrooms not permitted to Beran, but where he glimpsed marvellously intricate mechanisms. Below were rooms of general function panelled in dark board, with floors of russet rock-melt, generally unoccupied except for Beran. At the bottom, separated from the main chain of rooms was a large circular structure, which Beran eventually discovered to be Palafox's private dormitory.

For the first few weeks the pangs of homesickness stabbed Beran hard. Then one day as he sat on the settee in the hall tying aimless knots in a bit of string, there was the sound of footsteps; Beran looked up. Palafox entered the hall, began to pass through, then noticed Beran and came to a halt.

"Well there, young Panarch of Pao—why do you sit so quietly?"

"I don't want to stay here," growled Beran. "I don't like Breakness."

"No?" Palafox pretended surprise. "Why is that?"

"Everything is different from Pao. There isn't any sea, no trees, no—"

"Naturally!" exclaimed Palafox. "We have no trees but we have Breakness Institute. Now you will start learning, and then you'll find Breakness more interesting. First, the language of Breakness! We start at once. Come!"

Beran listlessly followed Palafox out the door. His interest in the Breakness language and Breakness Institute was minuscule, but activity of any kind would be welcome—as Palafox had foreseen.

Palafox stalked to the escalator, with Beran behind; they rode to the top of the house—rooms heretofore barred to Beran—and entered a wide workshop exposed to the gray-white sky through a ceiling of glass. A young man in a skin-tight suit of dark brown, one of Palafox's many sons, looked up from his work. He was thin and taut, his features were hard and

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bold. He resembled Palafox to a marked degree, even to tricks of gesture and poise of head. Palafox could take pride in such evidence of genetic vigor, which tended to shape all of his sons into near-simulacra of himself.

On Breakness status was based on a quality best described as creative and procreative efficacy, the forcible imprinting of self upon the future. But the situation which made for pride in the father discomfited the son, who must muster in himself a stronger ego than that of his father to achieve self-sufficiency in his own right.

For this reason there existed between high-status dominie and their sons a paradoxical discord of empathy, which tended to draw them close—and antagonism, which thrust them apart. To the sons was given the responsibility of caring for the father when at some advanced age cerebral sclerosis occurred, with a resulting senile dementia—usually with the body still apparently youthful. The senility, with its attendant recklessness, peevishness and irresponsibility, often touched off the mutual hostility into violence, which usually resulted in death for the old Dominie.

Between Palafox and Fanchiel, the young man in the dark brown suit, neither empathy nor hostility evinced itself openly: indeed the emotion was so all-pervasive throughout the houses, dormitories, and halls of the Institute as to be taken for granted.

Fanchiel had been tinkering with a minute fragment of mechanism clamped in a vise. He watched a magnified three-dimensional image of the device on a stage at eye-level; he wore gauntlets controlling micro-tools, and easily manipulated components invisible to the naked eye. At the sight of Palafox, he rose from his work, subordinating himself to the exceedingly intense ego of his progenitor.

The two men spoke in the language of Breakness for several minutes. Beran began to hope that he had been forgotten—then Palafox snapped his fingers and made a rather sententious pronouncement.

"This is Fanchiel, thirty-third of my sons," he said. "He will teach you much that is useful. I urge you to industry, enthusiasm and application—not after the Paonese fashion, but like the student at Breakness Institute, which we hope you shall become." He departed without further words.

Accumulated resentment suddenly merged inside Beran: the neglect, the boredom, the homesickness, and now this last cavalier disregard for his personal individuality. All contributed to a spasm of sullen Paonese obstinacy. He lowered his head, tightened his mouth.

"I don't care to learn Break-

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ness," he said. "I want to return to Pao."

Fanchiel seemed vaguely amused. "In time you certainly will return to Pao—perhaps as Panarch. If you returned at this moment you would be killed."

Beran's eyes stung with loneliness and misery. "When can I go back?"

"I don't know," said Fanchiel. "Lord Palafox is undertaking some great plan in connection with Pao. You will undoubtedly return when he thinks best. In the meanwhile you would do well to accept such advantages as are offered you."

Despite himself, Beran was impressed by Fanchiel's manner. "What will I learn at the Institute?"

"A thousand things—more than I can describe to you. In the College of Comparative Culture—where Lord Palafox is Dominie—you will study the races of the universe, their similarities and differences, their languages and basic urges, the specific symbols by which you can influence them.

"In the College of Mathematics you learn the manipulation of abstract ideas, various systems of rationality; likewise you are trained to make quick mental calculations.

"In the College of Human Anatomy you learn geriatry and death prevention, pharmacology, the technique of human modification and augmentation; and possibly you will be allowed one or two modifications."

Beran's imagination was stimulated. "Could I be modified like Palafox?"

"Ha hah!" exclaimed Fanchiel. "This is an amusing idea. Are you aware that Lord Palafox is one of the most powerfully modified men of Breakness? He controls nine sensitivities, four energies, three projections, two nullifications, three lethal emanations, in addition to miscellaneous powers such as the mental slide-rule, the ability to survive in a de-oxygenated atmosphere, anti-fatigue glands, a sub-clavicle blood chamber which automatically counteracts any poison he may have ingested. No, my ambitious young friend!"

For an instant Fanchiel's jutting features became soft with amusement. "But if ever you rule Pao, you will control a world-full of fecund girls, and thus you may command every modification known to the surgeons and anatomists of Breakness Institute."

Fanchiel paused an instant, then said briskly, "And now, to our first concern: the language of Breakness. Each language is a special tool, with a particular capability. It is more than a means of communication, it is a system of thought. Do you understand what I mean?"

Franchiel found his answer in Beran's expression.

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"Think of a language as the contour of a watershed, stopping flow in certain directions, channeling it into others. Language controls the mechanism of your mind. When people speak different languages, their minds work differently and they act differently. For instance: you know of the planet Vale?"

"Yes. The world where all the people are insane."

"Better to say, their actions give the impression of insanity. Actually they are complete anarchists. Now if we examine the speech of Vale we find, if not a reason for the behavior, at least a parallelism. Language on Vale is personal improvisation, with the fewest possible conventions. Each individual selects a speech as you or I might choose the color of our garments."

Beran frowned. "We Paonese are not careless in such matters. Our dress is established, and no one would wear a costume unfamiliar to him, or one which might cause misunderstanding."

A smile broke the austere cast of Fanchiel's face. "True, true; I forgot. The Paonese make no virtue of conspicuous dress. And—possibly as a corollary—mental abnormality is rare. The Paonese, fifteen billion of them, are pleasantly sane. Not so the people of Vale. They live to complete spontaneity—in clothes, in conduct, in language. The question arises: does the language provoke or merely reflect the eccentricity? Which came first: the language or the conduct?"

Beran admitted himself at a loss.

"In any event," said Fanchiel, "now that you have been shown the connection between language and conduct, you will be anxious to learn the language of Breakness."

VI

ON PAO THERE was peace and the easy flow of life. The population tilled their farms, fished the oceans, and in certain districts sieved great wads of pollen from the air, to make a pleasant honey-tasting cake.

The people had abandoned all opposition to Bustamonte. Defeat at the hands of the Brumbos was forgotten; Bustamonte's taxes were easier than those of Aiello, and he ruled with a lack of ostentation befitting his ambiguous accession to the Black.

But Bustamonte's satisfaction at the attainment of his ambition was not complete. A dozen aspects of his new life exasperated him; fears he had never suspected affected him with an intense disquiet. An impulsive man, his reaction to these unpleasant stimuli was often more violent than the occasion demanded.

Each dismal month Bustamonte

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framed a stinging defiance to send Eban Buzbek in lieu of the million marks, but each month caution prevailed, and each month Bustamonte, in helpless rage, despatched the tribute.

Four years passed; then one morning a red, black and yellow courier ship arrived at the Eiljanre space-port to discharge Cormoran Benbarth, scion of a junior branch of the Buzbeks. He presented himself at the Grand Palace as an absentee landlord might visit an outlying farm and greeted Bustamonte with casual amiability.

Bustamonte, wearing the Utter Black, maintained an expressionless face with great effort. He made the ceremonial inquiry. "What fortunate wind casts you upon our shores?" he asked.

Cormoran Benbarth, a tall young bravo with braided blond hair and magnificent blond mustaches, studied Bustamonte through eyes blue as cornflowers, wide and innocent as the Paonese sky.

"My mission is simple," he said. "I have come into possession of the North Faden Barony, which as you may or may not know is hard against the south countries of the Griffin Clan. I require funds for fortification and recruitment of followers."

"Ah," said Bustamonte.

Cormoran Benbarth tugged at the drooping blond mustache. "Eban Buzbek suggested that you might spare a million marks from your plenty, in order to incur my gratitude."

Bustamonte sat like an image of stone. His eyes held the innocent blue gaze for thirty seconds while his mind raced furiously. Submission to the extortion might entice an endless series of needy clansmen to the palace. The idea was intolerable. But could he deny this young brigand without fear of retaliation?

To Bustamonte's devious Paonese mind, it was inconceivable that the request could be anything other than a demand backed by an implicit threat of violence, to which he could offer no resistance. He threw up his arms in frustration, ordered forth the required sum and received Cormoran Benbarth's thanks in baleful silence.

Benbarth returned to Batmarsh in a mood of mild gratitude; Bustamonte's fury induced an abdominal acerbation. His resolve to defy the Brumbos became the guiding force of his life.

He spent moody weeks in reflection. It presently became clear that he must swallow his pride and petition those whose offices he had once rejected: the dominies of Breakness Institute.

Bustamonte took passage to the depot planet Journal and there boarded a packet for the voyage through the outer Marklaides.

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Presently he arrived at Breakness.

A lighter came up to meet the packet. Bustamonte gratefully departed the cramped hull, and was conveyed down through gigantic crags to the Institute.

Palafox presented himself, and the two set down to a table with a carafe of peppery tea between them. Palafox confined himself to bland platitudes. He ignored the unpleasantness of their last meeting on Pao, and showed no interest in the reason for Bustamonte's presence. At last Bustamonte hitched himself forward and spoke to the point.

"The late Panarch Aiello at one time sought your aid. He acted, as I see now, with foresight and wisdom. Therefore I have come in secrecy to Breakness to arrange a new contract between us."

Palafox arranged his goblet of tea with a delicacy conveying an entire paragraph of meaning. "Advice is our only export. It is yours—at a price."

Bustamonte frowned. "I did not come for *free* advice. But we can discuss payment when you have heard me out. I want you to supply us tools of war. Then we may defend ourselves, and so need be at no one's mercy."

Palafox raised his crooked black eyebrows. "Strange to hear such dynamic proposals from a Paonese."

"Why not?" demanded Bustamonte. "We are not cowards."

A hint of impatience entered Palafox's voice. "Ten thousand Brumbos overcome fifteen billion Paonese. Your people had weapons. But no one considered resistance. They acquiesced like grassbirds."

Bustamonte shook his head doggedly. "We are men like other men. All we need is training."

"You need far more. Training will never supply the desire to fight."

Bustamonte scowled. "Then this desire must be supplied!"

Palafox showed his teeth in a peculiar mirthless grin. He pulled himself erect in his chair. "At last we have touched the core of the matter."

Bustamonte glanced at him, puzzled by his sudden intensity.

Palafox continued. "We must persuade the amenable Paonese to become fighters. How can we do this? Evidently they must change their basic nature. They must discard passivity and easy adjustment to hardship. They must learn truculence and pride and competitiveness. Do you agree?"

Bustamonte hesitated. Palafox had outdistanced him, and seemed bent on a course other than that he had envisioned. "You may be right," he said cautiously.

"This is no overnight process, you understand. A change of basic psychology is a formidable process."

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Bustamonte looked away, out over the Wind River. "But you believe that this fighting force can be created?"

"Certainly."

"And how much time might be required?"

"Twenty years, more or less."

"Twenty years!"

"We must begin with children, with babies."

Bustamonte was silent several minutes. "I must think this over." He jumped to his feet, strode back and forth shaking his hands as if they were wet.

Palafox said with a trace of asperity. "How can it be otherwise? If you want a fighting force you must first create fighting spirit. This is a cultural trait and cannot be inculcated overnight."

"Yes, yes," muttered Bustamonte. "I see that you are right, but I must think."

"Think also on a second matter," Palafox suggested. "Pao is vast and populous. There is scope not merely for an effective army, but also a vast industrial complex might be established. Why buy goods from Mercantile when you can produce them yourself?"

"How can all this be done?" Bustamonte asked cunningly.

Palafox said incisively. "Words are tools. Language is a pattern, and defines the way the word-tools are used."

Bustamonte was eyeing Palafox sidelong, his expression suggesting that he considered the Dominie no more than an impractical academician. "How can this theory be applied practically? Do you have a definite detailed plan?"

Palafox inspected Bustamonte with scornful amusement. "For an affair of such magnitude? You expect miracles even a Breakness Wizard cannot perform. Perhaps you had best continue with the tribute to Eban Buzbek of Batmarsh."

Bustamonte was silent.

"I command basic principles," said Palafox presently, in an even voice. "I apply these abstractions to practical situations. This is the skeleton of the operation, which finally is fleshed over with detail."

Bustamonte still remained silent.

"One point I will make," said Palafox, "that such an operation can only be brought about by a ruler of great power, one who will not be swayed by maudlin sentiment."

"I have that power," said Bustamonte. "I am as ruthless as circumstances require."

"This is what must be done. One of the Paonese continents, or any appropriate area, will be designated. The people of this area will be persuaded to the use of a new language. That is the extent of the effort. Presently they will produce warriors in profusion."

Bustamonte frowned skepti-

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cally. "Why not undertake a program of education and training in arms? To change the language is going far afield."

"You have not grasped the essential point," said Palafox. "Paonese is a passive, dispassionate language. It presents the world in two dimensions, without tension or contrast. A people speaking Paonese theoretically should be docile, passive, without strong personality development—in fact exactly as the Paonese people are. The new language will be based on the contrast and comparison of strength, with a grammar simple and direct.

"To illustrate, consider the sentence, 'The farmer chops down a tree'." (Literally rendered from the Paonese in which the two men spoke, the sentence was: "Farmer *in state of exertion;* axe *agency;* tree *in state of subjection to attack.*") "In the new language the sentence becomes: 'The farmer overcomes the inertia of the axe; the axe breaks asunder the resistance of the tree.' Or perhaps: 'The farmer vanquishes the tree, using the weapon-instrument of the axe'."

"Ah," said Bustamonte appreciatively.

"The syllabary will be rich in effort-producing gutturals and hard vowels. A number of key ideas will be synonymous; such as *pleasure* and *overcoming a resistance; relaxation* and *shame; out-worlder* and *rival.* Even the clans of Batmarsh will seem mild compared to the future Paonese military."

"Yes, yes," breathed Bustamonte. "I begin to understand."

"Another area might be set aside for the inculcation of another language," said Palafox offhandedly. "In this case the grammar will be extravagantly complicated but altogether consistent and logical. The vocables would be discrete but joined and fitted by elaborate rules of accordance.

"What is the result? When a group of people, impregnated with these stimuli, are presented with supplies and facilities, industrial development is inevitable. And should you plan to seek ex-planetary markets, a corps of salesmen and traders might be advisable. Theirs would be a symmetrical language with emphatic number-parsing, elaborate honorifics to teach hypocrisy, a vocabulary rich in homophones to facilitate ambiguity, a syntax of reflection, reinforcement and alternation to emphasize the analogous interchange of human affairs.

"All these languages will make use of semantic assistance. To the military segment, a 'successful man' will be synonymous with 'winner of a fierce contest'; to the industrialists, 'efficient fabricator'; to the traders, 'a person irresistibly persuasive'. Such influences will pervade each of the lan-

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guages. Naturally they will not act with equal force upon each individual, but the mass action must be decisive."

"Marvellous!" cried Bustamonte, completely won over. "This is human engineering indeed!"

Palafox went to the window and looked across Wind River. He was faintly smiling and his black eyes, usually so black and hard, were softly unfocused. He swung about, his face emotionless.

"You understand that I merely talk at random—I formulate ideas, so to speak. Truly massive planning must be accomplished: the various languages must be synthesized, their vocabularies formulated. Instructors to teach the languages must be recruited; I can rely on my own sons. Another group must be organized, or perhaps derived from the first group: an elite corps of coordinators trained to fluency in each of the languages. This corps will ultimately become a managerial corporation, to assist your present civil service."

Bustamonte raised his eyebrows, blew out his cheeks. "Well—possibly. So far-reaching a function for this group seems unnecessary. Enough that we create a military force to smite Eban Buzbek and his bandits!" Bustamonte jumped to his feet, marched back and forth in excitement. He stopped short, looked slyly toward Palafox. "One further point we must discuss: what will be the fee for your services?"

"Six brood of women a month," said Palafox calmly, "of optimum intelligence and physique, between the ages of fourteen and twenty-four years, their time of indenture not to exceed fifteen years, their transportation back to Pao guaranteed, together with all sub-standard and female offspring."

Bustamonte, with a knowing smile, shook his head. "Six brood—is this not excessive? Surely you cannot successfully breed eighty-four women a month?"

Palafox darted him a burning glance. To question the genetic strength of a Breakness dominie was a prime solecism. Bustamonte, aware of his mistake added hastily, "However, I will agree to this figure. In return you must return me my beloved nephew, Beran, so that he may make preparation for a useful career."

"As a visitor to the floor of the sea?"

"We must take account of realities," murmured Bustamonte.

"I agree," said Palafox in a flat voice. "They dictate that Beran Panasper, Panarch of Pao, complete his education on Breakness."

Bustamonte broke out into furious protest; Palafox responded tartly. There was contention, with Bustamonte erupting into rage.

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Palafox remained contemptuously calm, and Bustamonte at last acceded to his terms.

The bargain was recorded upon film and the two parted, if not amicably, at least in common accord.

VII

A YEAR OR two after puberty, a youth of the Institute might expect to be presented with a girl by his sire. In expectation of this occasion, the pubescent youths spent considerable time at the space terminal where they might inspect the broods of incoming women.

In solemn groups they stood to the side, making grave appraisals, speculating on the planet of origin of some particular individual, calling to mind the sexual customs of the particular planet, and occasionally, if language permitted, verifying their speculations by putting a series of searching questions.

Beran, now in his fifteenth

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year, and attaining this particular stage in his development, was a youth of pleasant appearance, rather slender, almost frail. His hair was a dark brown, his eyes gray and wide, his expression pensive. Due to his exotic origin and a certain native diffidence, he was seldom party to what small group activity existed. When he finally felt the pre-adult stirrings in his blood and began to think of the girl whom he might expect to receive from Palafox, there was no one to accompany him to the space terminal; hence he went alone.

He chose a day on which the transport from Journal was due, and arriving just as the lighter dropped down from the orbiting ship, found the terminal in apparent confusion. To one side in quiet, almost stolid ranks, stood women at the end of their indentures, together with their girl children and those boys who had failed the Breakness tests. Their ages ranged from twenty-five to thirty-five; they would now return to their home-worlds as wealthy women, with most of their lives before them. They accounted themselves fortunate, although none would recall her years on Breakness with pleasure.

The lighter slid its nose under the shelter, the doors opened; young women trooped forth, looking curiously to right and left, swaying to the blast of the wind. Unlike the women at the ends of their identures, these were volatile and nervous, parading their defiance, concealing their apprehension. Their eyes roved everywhere, curious to find what sort of man would claim them.

Beran looked on in fascination. The women in their early maturity he disregarded, but the girls seemed easy and graceful, visions of erotic delight. Almost all were older than himself; but a few were barely past the age of puberty—women in body, children in mind.

The newcomers noticed the other women, those waiting to depart; the two groups examined each other in covert fascination.

A squad-leader gave a terse order; the incoming broods filed across the terminal to be registered and receipted; Beran strolled closer, sidling toward one of the younger girls. She turned wide sea-green eyes on him, then swung suddenly away. The look of her young body excited Beran, he moved forward—then stopped short. These women puzzled him. There was a sense of familiarity to them, the redolence of a pleasant past. He listened as they spoke among themselves. Their language was one he knew well.

He stood beside the girl. She observed him without friendliness.

"You are Paonese," Beran exclaimed in wonder. "What do Paonese women do on Breakness?"

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"The same as any other women."

"But this has never been the case!"

"You know very little of Pao," she said bitterly.

"No, no," said Beran, anxious for the girl's approval. "I am Paonese!"

"Then you must know what occurs on Pao."

Beran shook his head. "I have been here since the death of Panarch Aiello."

She spoke in a low voice, looking off across the terminal. "You chose well, for things go poorly. Bustamonte is a madman."

"He sends women to Breakness?" Beran asked in a hushed husky voice.

"A hundred a month—we who have been dispossessed or made orphans by the turmoil."

Beran's voice failed. He tried to speak; while he was stammering a question, the women began to move away. "Wait!" croaked Beran, running along beside. "What turmoil is this?"

"I cannot wait," the girl said bitterly. "I am indentured, I must do as I am bid."

"Where do you go? To the dormitory of what lord?"

"I am in the service of Lord Palafox."

Beran stopped short. He stared after the retreating figure. A vehicle waited at the door. Beran ran forward, to the side of the girl who ignored him.

"What is your name?" Beran demanded. "Tell me your name!"

Embarrassed and uncertain she said nothing. Two paces more and she would be gone, lost in the anonymity of the dormitory.

"Tell me your name! I shall claim you as my bride. Lord Palafox, whom I know well, who is all powerful here, will not refuse me."

She spoke swiftly over her shoulder: "Gitan Netsko"—then passed through the door and out of Beran's sight. The vehicle moved off the ramp, swayed in the wind, drifted down slope and was gone.

For a week thereafter Beran was plunged in the wildest kind of uncertainty. He had spoken impulsively and was tormented by the thought that Palafox might well be angered by such a request and refuse him pointblank.

And yet—miracle of miracles—the opposite proved the case.

Palafox agreed to the marriage without cavil, as if it were a matter of no real importance—a trivial incident in the complex and arduous instruction which Beran was undergoing for reasons which Palafox still refused to discuss with him without ambiguity and evasiveness.

The miracle had occurred, and that was sufficient unto itself. And now he was alone with Gitan Netsko, and they were sitting on a stone window-ledge in his cubicle

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staring down at a slope black and featureless as tar. Wind River was a roaring darkness and she was speaking in a low monotone.

"My father was a kind man. Never did he harm a living creature. Our home was almost a thousand years old; its timber was black with age and all the stone grew moss. We lived beside Mervan Pond with our yarrow behind and the plum orchard up the slope of Blue Mountain. When the agents came and ordered us to leave, my father was astonished. Leave our old home? A joke! Never! They spoke only three words and my father was angry and silent. Still we did not move. And the next time they came . . ." the sad voice dwindled away; tears made soft marks on Beran's arm.

"It will be mended!" said Beran, his abstract humanitarianism forgot, his mind fired with fury.

Gitan shook her head. "Impossible . . . And I would as soon be dead too."

"No, never say that!" Beran sought to comfort her. He stroked her hair, kissed her cheek. He could not help himself; the contact aroused him, his caresses became more intimate. She made no resistance; indeed she seemed to welcome the love-making as a distraction from her grief. Presently, in their various ways exhausted, they fell asleep.

AS EARLY as Breakness custom allowed, Beran presented himself at the house of Palafox. One of the sons-in-residence admitted him, inquired his business, which question Beran evaded. There was a delay of several minutes, while Beran waited nervously in a bleak little ante-room near the top of the house.

Beran's instinct warned him to circumspection, to a preliminary testing of the ground—but he knew, with a sinking feeling at the pit of his stomach, that he lacked the necessary finesse.

At last he was summoned and conducted far down the escalator, into a wood-paneled morning room, where Palafox, in a somber blue robe, sat eating bits of hot pickled fruit.

Palafox looked at him intently. Beran made the customary gesture of respect and spoke in the most serious voice he could muster. "Lord Palafox, I have come to an important decision. I want to return to Pao."

Standing in Palafox's presence, abashed before the triumphant Ego, Beran felt nothing but his own callowness, his naivete, his brashness in coming to challenge the most forceful dominie of Breakness Institute. Nevertheless, his goals must be achieved, and, with a lame embarrassed obstinacy, he plowed ahead.

"I have been thinking about

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Bustamonte's program, and I am worried. It may bring benefits—but I feel there is something abnormal and unnatural at work."

Palafox's mouth compressed. "Assuming the correctness of your sensations—what could you do to counter this tendency?"

Beran spoke eagerly. "I am the true Panarch, am I not? Is not Bustamonte merely Ayudor-Senior? If I appear before him, he must obey me."

"In theory. How will you assert your identity? Suppose he claims you to be a madman, an impostor?"

Beran stood silently; it was a point which he had not considered.

Palafox continued relentlessly. "You would be subaqueated, your life would be quenched. What would you have achieved?"

Beran tightened his lips.

"Perhaps I would not announce myself to Bustamonte. If I came down on one of the islands—Ferai or Viamne—"

"Very well then. Suppose you convinced a certain number of persons of your identity, Bustamonte would still resist. You might precipitate disturbances—even civil war. If you consider Bustamonte's reactions ruthless, consider your own intentions in this light."

Beran smiled, at last sure of his ground. "You do not understand the Paonese. There would be no war. Bustamonte would merely find himself without authority."

Palafox did not relish the correction of his views. "And if Bustamonte learns of your coming, and meets the ship with a squad of neutraloids, what then?"

"How would he know?"

Palafox ate a bit of spiced apple. He spoke deliberately. "I would tell him."

Beran was astounded—but perhaps only at the top of his mind. "Then you oppose me?"

Palafox smiled his faint smile. "Not unless you act against my interests—which at this time coincide with those of Bustamonte."

"What are your interests, then?" cried Beran. "What do you hope to achieve?"

"On Breakness," said Palafox softly "those are questions which one never asks."

Beran was silent a moment. Then he turned away, exclaiming bitterly, "Why did you bring me here? Why did you sponsor me at the Institute?"

Palafox, the basic conflict now defined, relaxed and sat at his ease. "Where is the mystery? The able strategist provides himself as many tools and procedures as possible. Your function was to serve as a lever against Bustamonte, if the need should arise."

"And so now I am of no further use to you?"

Palafox shrugged. "I am no

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seer; I cannot read the future But my plans for Pao—"

"Your plans for Pao!" Beran interjected in astonishment and shock.

"—develop smoothly. My best estimate is that you are no longer an asset, for now you threaten to impede the smooth flow of events. It is best, therefore, that our basic relationship is clear. I am by no means your enemy, but neither do our interests coincide. You have no cause for complaint. Without my help you would be dead. I have provided your sustenance, shelter, an unexcelled education. I will continue to sponsor your career unless you take action against me. There is no more to say. Permit me to finish my repast."

Beran rose to his feet, bowed in formal respect. He turned to depart, hesitated, looked back. Meeting the black eyes, wide and burning, he felt shock. This was not the notably rational Dominie Palafox, intelligent, highly-modified, second in prestige only to Lord Dominie Vampellte; this man was strange and wild, and radiated a mental force over and beyond the logic of normality.

Beran faltered. "May I inquire your plans for Pao?"

The disturbing apparition vanished; the familiar Palafox sipped a cup of tea, then spoke. "I reiterate, another man's plans are not your proper concern."

With no further words, Beran departed.

Beran returned to his cubicle, where he found Gitan Netsko sitting on the stone window-ledge, chin on knees, arms clasped around her ankles.

She looked up as he came in, and in spite of his depression, Beran felt a pleasurable, if wistful, thrill of ownership. She was charming, he thought: a typical Paonese of the Vinelands, slender and clear-skinned with fine bones and precisely-molded features. Her expression was unreadable; he had no hint as to how she regarded him, but this was how it went on Pao, where the sexual relationships of youth were traditionally shrouded in indirection and ambiguity. A lift of an eyebrow could indicate passion; a hesitancy, a lowered pitch of the voice absolute aversion . . .

Abruptly Beran said, "Palafox will not permit my return to Pao."

"No? So then?"

He walked to the window, gazed somberly across the mist-streaming chasm. "So then—I will depart without his permission . . . As soon as opportunity offers."

She surveyed him skeptically. "And if you return—what is the use of that?"

Beran shook his head dubiously. "I don't know exactly. I would hope to restore order, bring about a return to the old ways."

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She laughed sadly, without scorn. "It is a fine ambition. I hope I shall see it."

"I hope you shall too."

"But I am puzzled. How will you effect all this?"

"I don't know. In the simplest case I will merely issue the orders." Observing her expression, Beran explained. "You must understand, I am the true Panarch. My uncle Bustamonte is an assassin; he killed my father Aiello."

Her eyes widened and she leapt to her feet and stared at him for an instant in stunned disbelief. Then—and the gesture seemed as natural to her as breathing—she sank to her knees, placing both of her hands, palms upward, upon his sandaled feet, and whispering words of almost worshipful import.

Slowly he bent, and raised her up, shaking his head, saying over and over, "No, no, no." Then: "You mustn't. I am only a man—like other men. A man in love."

VIII

BERAN'S resolve to return to Pao was difficult to implement. He had neither funds to buy, nor authority to commandeer, transportation. He tried to beg passage for himself and the girl; he was rebuffed and ridiculed everywhere he turned. At last, frustrated, he sulked in his rooms, ignoring his studies, exchanging hardly a word with Gitan Netsko, who spent most of her time staring blankly along the windy chasm. Beran one time inquired what she found of interest in barren stone and windy haze, to which she replied that she saw none of it, nothing except the thoughts which passed before her eyes.

Three months passed. And one morning Gitan Netsko remarked that she thought herself pregnant.

Beran stared at her incredulously. Barely adolescent himself, he had never envisioned fathering a child. He took Gitan Ntesko to the clinic, registered her for the pre-natal regimen. His appearance aroused surprise and amusement among the staff of the clinic.

"You bred the child without assistance? Come now, tell us: who is the actual father?"

"She is indentured to me," Beran stated, indignant and angry. "I am the father!"

"Forgive our skepticism, but you appear hardly the age of virility."

"The facts seem to contradict you," Beran retorted.

"We shall see, we shall see." They motioned to Gitan Netsko. "Into the laboratory with you."

At the last moment the girl became afraid. "Please, I'd rather not."

"It's all part of our usual routine," the reception clerk assured

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her. "Come, this way, if you please."

Beran waited—an hour, two hours. He went to the door, knocked. A young medic came forth and Beran thought to detect discomfort in his expression.

"Why the delay?"

The medic held up his hand. "I fear that there have been complications. It appears that you have not sired after all."

A chill began to spread through Beran's viscera. "What sort of complications?"

The medic moved away, back through the door. "You had best return to your dormitory. There is no need to wait longer."

Tears swelling at his eyes, Beran ran forward, groping to hold back the door. "Tell me, tell me!" But the door closed in his face, and there was no further response to his signals . . .

GITAN NETSKO was taken to the laboratory, where she submitted to a number of routine tests. Presently she was laid, back down, on a pallet and rolled underneath a heavy machine. An electric field damped her cephalic currents, anaesthetized her while the machine dipped an infinitesimally thin needle into her abdomen, searched into the embryo and withdrew a half-dozen cells.

The field died; Gitan Netsko returned to consciousness. She was now conveyed to a waiting room, while the genetic structure of the embryonic cells was evaluated, categorized and classified by a calculator.

The signal returned: "A male child, normal in every phase. Class AA expectancy." The index to her own genetic type was shown, and, likewise, that of the father.

The operator observed the paternal index without particular interest, then looked again. He called an associate, they chuckled, and one of them spoke into a communicator.

The voice of Lord Palafox returned. "A Paonese girl? Show me her face . . . I remember; I bred her before I turned her over to my ward. It is definitely my child?"

"Indeed, Lord Palafox. There are few indices we are more familiar with."

"Very well; I will convey her to my dormitory."

Palafox appeared ten minutes later. He bowed with formal respect to Gitan Netsko, who surveyed him with fear. She had experienced nothing but pain at his hands; none of her imaginings had prepared her for the callousness of his breeding.

Palafox spoke politely. "It appears that you are carrying my child, of Class AA expectancy, which is excellent. I will take you to my personal lying-in ward, where you will get the best of care."

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She looked at him blankly. "It is your child that I carry?"

"So the analyzers show. If you bear well, you will earn a bonus. I assure you, you will never find me niggardly."

She jumped to her feet, eyes blazing. "This is horror; I won't bear such a monster!"

She ran wildly down the room, out the door, with the medic and Palafox coming behind.

She sped past the door which led to the room where Beran waited, but saw only the great spine of the escalator which communicated with levels above and below. At the landing she paused, looked behind with a wild grimace. The spare shape of Palafox was only a few yards behind.

"Halt!" he cried in passion. "You carry my child! Take care not to anger me."

She made no answer, but turning, looked down the staircase. She closed her eyes, sighed, let herself fall forward.

Down and down she rolled, bumping and thudding, while Palafox stared after her in amazement.

At last she came to rest, far below, a limp huddle, oozing blood.

The medics took her up on a litter, but the child was gone and Palafox departed in disgust.

There were other injuries, and since she had decided on death, the Breakness medicine could not force life upon her; and she died an hour or two after her fall.

When Beran returned the next day he was told that the child had been that of Lord Palafox; that, upon learning of this fact, the girl had returned to the dormitory of Palafox in order to collect the birth-bonus. The actual circumstances were rigidly suppressed; in the society of Breakness Institute, nothing could so reduce a man's prestige or make him more ridiculous in the eyes of his peers than an episode of this sort: that a woman had killed herself rather than bear his child.

For a week Beran sat in his cubicle, or wandered the windy streets as long as his flesh would withstand the chill. And indeed it was by no conscious will that his feet took him trudging back to the dormitory.

Why had she gone to Palafox? Had she been promised swifter return to Pao? . . . Pao! Waves of homesickness swept over Beran. Pao, blue with water, green with leaves, warm from the sunlight! Pao! His only escape from misery was to return to Pao!

He reacted from his stupor and dullness with an almost vicious emotion. He flung himself into his work at the Institute, wadding knowledge into his mind to serve as poultice against his grief.

After the passing of Gitan Netsko, Beran once more began to frequent the space-port—as much

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in hopes of garnering news of Pao as watching the incoming women. On his fourth visit he was startled to see debarking from the lighter a large group of young men—forty or fifty—almost certainly Paonese. When he drew close enough to hear their speech, his assumption was verified; they were Paonese indeed!

He approached one of the group as they stood waiting for registration, a tall sober-faced youth no older than himself. He forced himself to speak casually. "How goes it on Pao?"

The newcomer appraised him carefully, as if calculating how much veracity he could risk. In the end he made a non-committal reply. "As well as might be, times and conditions as they are."

Beran had expected little more. "What do you do here on Breakness, so many of you in a group?"

"We are apprentice linguists, here for advanced study."

" 'Linguists'? On Pao? What innovation is this?"

The newcomer made no immediate reply, but studied Beran with doubt and speculation. Then he said, "You speak Paonese with a native accent. Strange you know so little of current affairs."

"I have lived on Breakness for several years," said Beran. "You are the second Paonese I have seen in this time."

"I see . . . Well, there have been changes. Today on Pao one must know five languages merely to ask for a glass of wine."

The line advanced toward the desk. Beran kept pace, as one time before he had kept pace with Gitan Netsko. As he watched the names being noted into a register, into his mind came a notion which excited him to such an extent that he could hardly speak.

"How long will you study on Breakness?" he asked huskily.

"A year."

Beran stepped back, made a careful estimate of the situation. The plan seemed feasible; in any case, what could he lose? He glanced down at his clothes: typical Breakness wear. Retiring to a corner, he pulled off his blouse and singlet; by reversing their order and allowing them to hang loose outside his trousers he achieved an effect approximately Paonese.

He fell in at the end of the line. The youth ahead of him looked back curiously, but made no comment. Presently he came to the registration desk. The clerk was a young Institute don four or five years older than himself. He seemed bored with his task and barely glanced up when Beran came to the desk.

"Name?" asked the clerk in heavy Paonese.

"Ercole Paraio."

The clerk broodingly scanned the list. "What are the symbols?"

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Beran spelled forth the fictitious name.

"Strange," muttered the clerk. "It's not on the roster . . . Some inefficient fool . . ." His voice dwindled; he twitched the sheet. "The symbols again?"

Beran spelled the name, and the clerk added it to the registration manifest.

"Very well; here is your passbook. Carry it at all times on Breakness; you will surrender it when you return to Pao."

Beran followed the others to a waiting vehicle, and in the new identity of Ercole Paraio, rode down the slope to a new dormitory. It seemed a fantastic hope . . . And yet—why not?

The apprentice-linguists had no reason to accuse him; their minds were occupied by the novelty of Breakness. Who would investigate Beran, the neglected ward of Palafox? No one. Each student of the Institute was responsible only to himself. As Ercole Paraio, he could find enough freedom to maintain the identity of Beran Panasper, until such time that Beran should disappear. And if his ploy were discovered, what then? What harm could come? . . . And Beran, with the other apprentice linguists from Pao, was assigned a sleeping cubicle and a place at the refectory table.

In the morning the lessons would begin.

The class was convocated the next morning in a bare stone hall roofed with clear glass. The wan sunlight slanted in, cut the wall with a division between light and shade.

A young Institute don named Finisterle, one of Palafox's many sons, appeared to address the group. Beran had noticed him many times in the corridors of the Institute, tall, even more gaunt than the Breakness norm, with Palafox's prow-like nose and commanding forehead, but with brooding brown eyes and a dark-oak skin inherited from his nameless mother. He spoke in a quiet, almost gentle voice, looking from face to face, and Beran wondered whether Finisterle would recognize him, and if he did, what his reaction might be.

"In a sense, you are an experimental group," said Finisterle. "It is necessary that many Paonese learn many languages swiftly; training here on Breakness may be a means to this end. Perhaps in some of your minds is confusion. Why, you ask, must we learn three new languages? In your case, the answer is simple: you will be an elite managerial corps; you will coordinate, you will expedite, you will instruct.

"But this does not completely answer your question. Why, you ask, must anyone learn a new language? The response to this question is found in the science of dynamic linguistics. Language de-

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termines the pattern of thought, the sequence in which various types of reactions follow acts.

"No language is neutral; all languages contribute impulse to the mass mind, and in an even wider frame of reference we note that every language imposes a certain world-view upon the mind."

When Finisterle had finished his speech, he made no move to accost Beran, and seemed, rather, to ignore him. Beran thought perhaps he had gone unrecognized after all.

But on the following day, entering a depiction booth at the library, he almost bumped into Finisterle emerging. The two looked eye to eye; then Finisterle stepped aside with a polite excuse, and went his way. Beran, his face hot as fire, entered the booth, but was too upset to code for the film he had come to study.

Then the next morning, as luck would have it, he was assigned to a recitation class conducted by Finisterle, and found himself seated across a dark teak table from this ubiquitous son of Palafox.

Finisterle's expression never quivered; he was grave and polite when he spoke to Beran—but Beran thought to see a sardonic spark in his eyes. He seemed too grave, too solicitous, too courteous.

Beran's nerves could stand no further suspense. After the class he waited in his seat while the others departed. Finisterle, likewise, had risen to leave. He lifted his eyebrows in polite surprise when Beran spoke to him.

"You have a question, Student Paraio?"

"I want to know what you plan toward me. Why don't you report me to Palafox?"

Finisterle made no pretense of incomprehension. "The fact that as Beran Panasper you attend the Institute, and as Ercole Paraio you study languages with the Paonese? What should I plan, why should I report you?"

"I don't know. I wonder if you will."

Finisterle pondered. "I cannot understand how your conduct affects me."

Beran stared hard at him.

"You must know I am here as ward of Lord Palafox."

"Oh, indeed. But I have no mandate to guard his interests. Even," he added delicately, "if I desired to do so."

Beran looked his surprise. Finisterle went on in a soft voice. "You are Paonese, you do not understand us of Breakness. We are total individuals; each has his private goal. The Paonese word 'cooperation' has no counterpart on Breakness. How would I advance myself by monitoring your case to Sire Palafox? Such an act is irreversible; I commit myself without perceptible advantage. If

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I say nothing, I have alternate channels always open."

Beran stammered, "Do I understand then, that you do not intend to report me?"

Finisterle nodded. "Not unless it reacts to my advantage. And this I can not envision at the moment." He nodded his head courteously and left the room . . .

THE YEAR moved to its completion. Beran, through a combination of natural intelligence, zeal and his prior knowledge of the Breakness language, achieved a creditable record as apprentice linguist, and likewise sustained something of his previous program. In effect Beran lived two distinct existences, each insulated from the other. His old life, as student at Breakness Institute, offered no problem, since no one spent an iota of attention on any but his own problems.

As an apprentice linguist, the situation was more difficult. His fellow students were Paonese, gregarious and inquisitive, and Beran won a reputation for eccentricity, for he had neither time nor inclination to join the spare time recreations.

In a jocular moment the students contrived a bastard mishmash of a language, assembled from scraps of Paonese, Cogitant, Valiant, Technicant, Mercantil and Batch, with a syncretic syntax and heterogeneous vocabulary. This patchwork tongue was known as Pastiche.

The students vied in fluency and used it to the disapproval of the instructors, who felt that the effort might better be spent in their studies. The students, referring to the Valiants, the Technicants, and the Cogitants, argued that in all logic and consistency the Interpreters should likewise speak a characteristic tongue—so why not Pastiche?

The instructors agreed in principle, but objected to Pastiche as a formless melange, a hodge-podge without style or dignity. The students were unconcerned, but nevertheless made amused attempts to contrive style and dignity for their creation.

Beran mastered Pastiche with the others, but took no part in its formulation. With other demands on his attention, he had small energy for linguistic recreations. And ever as the time of reutrn to Pao drew near, Beran's nerves tautened, and his fear of apprehension increased. A year of hope blasted; how could he bear it?

One month remained, then a week, and the linguists spoke of nothing but Pao.

Beran remained apart from the others, pale and anxious, gnawing his lips. And then, during the final recitations, the instructor exploded a bombshell. The shock came with such sudden devastation that Beran was frozen in his seat and

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a pink fog blurred his vision.

". . . you will now hear the eminent dominie who initiated the program. He will explain the scope of your work, the responsibilities that are yours. Here is Lord Palafox."

Palafox strode into the room, looking neither right nor left. Beran crouched helplessly in his seat, a rabbit hoping to evade the notice of an eagle. He sat rather to the rear of the room, but could he possibly avoid notice?

Palafox bowed formally to the class, making a casual survey of faces. Beran sat with head ducked behind the youth ahead; Palafox's eyes did not linger in his direction.

"I have followed your progress," said Palafox. "You have done creditably. Your presence here on Breakness was frankly an experiment, and your achievements have been compared to the work of similar groups studying on Pao. Apparently the Breakness atmosphere is a stimulus; your work has been appreciably superior. I understand that you have even evolved a characterisitc language of your own—Pastiche." He smiled indulgently. "It is an ingenious idea, and even though the tongue lacks elegance, a real achievement.

"I assume that you understand the magnitude of your responsibilities. You comprise nothing less than the bearings on which the machinery of Pao will run; without your services, the new social mechanisms of Pao could not mesh, could not function. In a large measure your efforts will determine the future of Pao."

He bowed once more and marched for the door. Beran watched him approach with thumping heart. He passed an arm's length away. Beran could feel the air of his passage. With the utmost difficulty he prevented himself from hiding his face in his hands. Palafox's head never turned; he left the room without slackening his stride. Beran sagged sprawled out, his arms and legs limp. Palafox was not infallible—and Palafox had not seen him.

On the day following, the class with great jubilation departed the dormitory and rode the air-bus to the terminal. Among them, concealed by his identity with the others, was Beran.

The class entered the terminal, filed toward the check-off desk. The line moved forward; his mates spoke their names, turned in their pass-books, received passage vouchers, departed through the gate into the waiting lighter.

Beran came to the desk. "Ercole Paraio," he said huskily, putting his pass-book down.

"Ercole Paraio." The clerk checked off the name, pushed across a voucher.

Beran took the voucher with trembling fingers, moved forward, walked as fast as he dared to the

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gate. He looked neither right nor left, afraid to meet the sardonic gaze of Lord Palafox.

He passed through the gate, into the lighter. Presently the port closed, the lighter rose from the rock-melt flat, swung to the blast of the wind. Up and away from Breakness, up to the orbiting ship. And finally Beran dared hope that his plan of a year's duration, his scheme to escape Breakness, might succeed.

The linguists transferred into the ship, the lighter fell away. A pulse, a thud—the voyage had begun.

Breakness astern, Pao ahead. Beran's escape from Breakness Institute was reality.

And as he speculated, his mind went back to his escape, the simple wonder of it. He had escaped the vigilance of Breakness Institute, the outwardly insurmountable forces arrayed against him by the merest accident—a blind fluke. But was that so incredible, really? Did not many of the great turning points in the history of civilizations, the great changes that shook established customs to their foundations, have their origin in some trivial incident—a shrewd man's accidental, momentary carelessness, a breakdown or lapse of authority at some vital point? No, it was not too incredible. Many times before a prisoner with the lightning at his fingertips had simply walked out, unobserved and unchallenged. It was one of the recurrent ironies of life.

IX

THE SMALL white sun dwindled, became a single glitter in the myriad; the ship floated in black space, imperceptibly shifting through the stars of the cluster.

At last yellow Auriol grew bright, tended by blue-green Pao. Beran could not leave the bulls-eye. He watched the world expand, lurch from a disk to a sphere. He traced the configuration of the eight continents, put names to a hundred islands, located the great cities. Nine years had passed—almost half of his life. He could not hope to find Pao the world of his recollections.

His perspectives had changed, and Pao had by no means enjoyed nine years of tranquillity. Still, the blue oceans, the verdant islands would be the same; the innumerable villages with whitewashed walls and brown tile roofs, the masses of people—to alter all these would require a greater power than Bustamonte's.

He could hardly keep his emotions in check when at last the ship berthed and the linguists marched through the port into the shabby old terminal. There was no one to meet them, a fact which only Beran, accustomed to the automatic efficiency of Breakness, found extraordinary. Looking

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around the faces of his fellows, he thought, *I am changed. Palafox did his worst upon me. I love Pao, but I am no longer Paonese. I am tainted with the flavor of Breakness; I can never be truly and wholly a part of this world again—or of any other world. I am dispossessed, eclectic; I am Pastiche.*

Beran separated himself from the others, went to the portal, looked down the tree-shaded boulevard toward Eiljanre. He could step forth, lose himself in a moment.

And then? Where would he go? If he appeared at the palace, he would be risking his life. At best, he would be given a manual task. He had no wish to farm, to fish, to carry loads. Thoughfully he turned back, rejoined the linguists. It was always possible that his imposture might be discovered, but Paonese records were hardly precise enough to make this event likely.

The official welcoming committee arrived; one of the dignitaries performed a congratulatory declamation, the linguists made formal appreciation. They were then ushered aboard a bus and taken to one of the rambling Eiljanre inns.

Beran, scanning the streets, was puzzled. His imagination had depicted repression and terror, but he saw only the usual Paonese ease. Naturally, this was Eiljanre, not the resettled areas of Shraimand and Vidamand—but surely the sheer reflection of Bustamonte's tyranny must leave a mark! The faces along the avenue were placid.

The bus entered the Cantatrino, a great park with three artificial mountains and a lake, the memorial of an ancient Panarch for his dead daughter, the fabulous Can. The bus passed a moss-draped arch, where the park authority had arranged a floral portrait of Panarch Bustamonte. Someone had expressed his feelings with a handful of black slime, and the orchids of the benign cheek showed a grotesque blot. Beran felt vindicated. A small sign—but it revealed much, for the Paonese seldom made political judgments.

Ercole Paraio was assigned to the Progress School at Cloeopter, on the shores of Zelambre Bay, at the north of Vidamand. This was the area designated by Bustamonte to be the manufacturing and industrial center for all Pao. The school was located in an ancient stone monastery, built by the first settlers to a purpose long forgotten

The students were fed, clothed, housed and furnished only with the essentials. If they desired luxuries, play equipment, special tools, private rooms, these could be earned by producing articles for use elsewhere in Pao, and almost all of the students' spare

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time was devoted to small industrial ventures.

They produced toys, pottery, simple electrical devices, aluminum ingots reduced from nearby ore, and even periodicals printed in Technicant. A group of eight year students had joined in a more elaborate project: a plant to extract minerals from the ocean and to this end spent all their funds for the necessary equipment.

The instructors were for the most part young Breakness dons. From the first Beran was perplexed by a quality he was unable to locate, let alone identify; only after he had lived at Cloeopter two months did the source of the oddness come to him. It lay in the curious similarity which linked these Breakness dons. Once Beran had come this far, total enlightenment followed. These youths were all sons of Palafox. The name was never spoken in Beran's hearing, and probably—so Beran conjectured—never out of it.

Surely they were aware of their common parentage. The situation was strange, provocative to the imagination. What could they gain on this alien planet? By all tradition they should be engrossed in their most intensive studies at the Institute, preparing themselves for their Authority, earning modifications. But no, here they worked at an occupation they must regard as menial. Beran found the entire situation mysterious.

At the end of two years Beran was transferred to Pon, on Nonamand, the bleak island continent in the southern hemisphere. The transfer came as an unpleasant surprise, for Beran had established an easy routine at Zelambre Bay.

The teaching staff, like that of the Zelambre schools, consisted primarily of young Breakness dons and, again, they were all sons of Palafox. In residence were a dozen Paonese sub-ministers, representatives of Bustamonte, and Beran's function was to maintain coordination between the two groups.

A situation which aroused considerable uneasiness in Beran was the fact that Finisterle, the Breakness don who knew Beran's true identity, also worked at Pon. Three times Beran, with pounding heart, managed to slip aside before Finisterle could notice him, but on the fourth occasion the meeting could not be avoided. Finisterle made only the most casual of acknowledgements and passed on, leaving Beran staring after him.

In the next few weeks Beran saw Finisterle a number of times, and at last entered into guarded conversation. Finisterle's comments were the very definition of indirection.

Beran divined that Finisterle was anxious to continue his studies at the Institute, but remained at Pon for three reasons: first, it was the wish of his sire, Lord Palafox. Second, Finisterle felt that oppor-

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tunity to breed sons of his own was easier on Pao than on Breakness. With so much, he was comparatively candid; the third reason was told more by his silences than his words. He seemed to regard Pao as a world in flux, a place of vast potentialities, where great power and prestige might be had by a person sufficiently deft and decisive.

But it was not Finisterle who gave Beran the greatest jolt. Several months later, leaving the administration headquarters, he came face to face with Palafox himself.

Beran froze in his tracks; Palafox stared down from his greater height.

Summoning his composure, Beran performed the Paonese gesture of greeting. Palafox returned a sardonic acknowledgement. "I am surprised to see you here," said Palafox. "I had assumed that you were diligently pursuing your education on Breakness."

"I learned a great deal," said Beran. "And then I lost all heart for further learning."

Palafox's eyes glinted. "Education is not achieved through the heart; it is a systematization of the mental processes."

"But I am something other than a mental process," said Beran. "I am a man. I must reckon with the whole of myself."

Palafox appeared to be thinking, his eyes first contemplating Beran, then sliding along the line of the Sgolaph crags. When he spoke his voice was amiable, although the sense of his words was obscure. "There are no absolute certainties in this universe; a man must try to whip order into a yelping pack of probabilities, and uniform success is impossible."

Beran understood the meaning latent in Palafox's rather general remarks. "Since you had assured me that you took no further interest in my future, it was necessary that I act for myself. I did so, and returned to Pao."

Palafox nodded. "Beyond question, events took place outside the radius of my control. Still these rogue circumstances are often as advantageous as the most carefully nurtured plans." He stepped back a pace, inspected Beran from head to foot. "Evidently you occupy yourself as a linguist."

Beran made a rather reluctant admission that this was so.

"If for no other reason," said Palafox, "you should feel gratitude to me and Breakness Institute."

"Gratitude would be a misleading oversimplification," said Beran in his driest tones.

"Possibly so," agreed Palafox. "And now, if you will excuse me, I must hurry to my appointment with the Director."

"One moment," said Beran. "I am perplexed. You seem not at all disturbed by my presence on

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Pao. Do you plan to inform Bustamonte?"

Palafox showed restiveness at the direct question; it was one which a Breakness dominie would never have deigned to make. Nevertheless Palafox returned a courteous reply. "I plan no interference in your affairs." He hesitated a moment, then spoke in a new and confidential manner. "If you must know, circumstances have altered. Panarch Bustamonte becomes more headstrong as the years go by, and your presence may serve a useful purpose."

Beran angrily started to speak, but observing Palafox's faintly amused expression held his tongue. After all, Palafox need speak but a single sentence to bring about his death.

"I must be on to my business," said Palafox. "Events proceed at an ever accelerating tempo. The next year or two will resolve a number of uncertainties."

Three weeks after his encounter with Palafox, Beran was transferred to Deirombona on Shraimand, where a multitude of infants, heirs to five thousand years of Paonese placidity, had been immersed in a plasm of competitiveness. Many of these were now only a few years short of manhood.

Deirombona was the oldest inhabited site on Pao, a sprawling low city of coral block in a forest of phaltorhyncus. For some reason not readily apparent, the city had been evacuated of its two million inhabitants. Deirombona Harbor remained in use; a few administrative offices had been given over to Valiant affairs; otherwise the old buildings lay stark as skeletons, bleaching under the tall trees.

Ten Valiant cantonments had been established at intervals up the coast, each headquarters to a legion of Myrmidons, as the Valiant warriors called themselves.

Beran had been assigned to the Deirombona Legion, and had at his disposal all the abandoned city in which to find living quarters. He selected an airy cottage on the old Lido, and was able to make himself extremely comfortable.

In many ways the Valiants were the most interesting of all the new Paonese societies. They were easily the most dramatic. Like the Technicants of Zelambre Bay and the Cogitants of Pon, the Valiants were a race of youths, the oldest not yet Beran's age. They made a strange glittering spectacle as they strode through the Paonese sunlight, arms swinging, eyes fixed straight ahead in mystical exaltation. Their garments were intricate and of many colors, but each wore a personal device on his chest, legion insignia on his back.

During the day the young men and women trained separately, mastering their new weapons and mechanisms, but at night they ate and slept together indiscriminately,

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distinction being only one of rank. Sexual contcts were common, casual, barren of any sublimation or fervor. Emotional import was given only to organizational relationships, to competition for rank and honor.

On the evening of Beran's arrival at Deirombona, a ceremonial convocation took place at the cantonment. At the center of the parade ground a great fire burnt on a platform. Behind rose the Deirombona stele, a prism of black metal emblazoned with emblems. To either side stood ranks of young Myrmidons, and tonight all wore common garb: a plain dark gray leotard. Each carried a ceremonial lance, with a pale flickering flame in the place of a blade.

A fanfare rang out. A girl in white came forward, carrying an insignia of copper, silver and brass. While the Myrmidons knelt and bowed their heads, the girl carried the insignia three times around the fire and fixed it upon the Stele.

The fire roared high. The Myrmidons rose to their feet, thrust their lances into the air. They formed into ranks and marched from the square.

The next day Beran received an explanation from his immediate superior, Sub-Strategist Gian Firanu, a soldier-of-fortune from one of the far worlds. "You witnsesed a funeral—a hero's funeral. Last week Deirombona held wargames with Tarai, the next camp up the coast. A Tarai submarine had penetrated our net and was scoring against our base. All the Deirombona warriors were eager, but Lemauden was first. He dove five hundred feet with a torch and cut away the ballast. The submarine rose and was captured. But Lemauden drowned—possibly by accident."

" 'Possibly by accident'? How else? Surely the Tarai—"

"No, not the Tarai. But it might have been a deliberate act. These lads are wild to place their emblems on the Stele; they'll do anything to create a legend."

Beran went to the window. Along the Deirombona esplanade swaggered groups of young bravos. Was this Pao? Or some fantastic world a hundred light-years distant?

He felt restless. There was urgency in the air, a sense of pressure. He rose to his feet, looked all around him: up the deserted streets, out across the sea. He jumped down to the beach, walked along the shore to the single inn still functioning in the town. In the public tavern he ordered chilled wine, and taking it out on the rattan-shaded terrace, drank rather more deeply and hastily than was his custom.

The air was heavy, the horizons close. From up the street, near the building where he worked, he saw movement, color: several men in purple and brown.

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Beran half-rose from his seat, staring. He sank slowly back, sat limp. Thoughtfully he sipped his wine. A dark shadow crossed his vision. He looked up; a tall figure stood in front of him: Palafox.

Palafox nodded a casual greeting and seated himself. "It appears," said Palafox, "that the history of contemporary Pao has not yet completely unfolded."

Beran said something indistinguishable. Palafox nodded his head gravely, as if Beran had put forward a profound wisdom. He indicated the three men in brown and purple who had entered the inn and were now conferring with the major-domo.

"A useful aspect of Paonese culture is the style of dress. One may determine a person's profession at a glance. Are not brown and purple the colors of the internal police?"

"Yes, that is true," said Beran. Suddenly his anxiety was gone. The worst had occurred, the tension was broken: impossible to dread what had already happened. The journey to Eiljanre, the meeting with Bustamonte, the weights on his feet, the plunge through the air, the surging water—these were formalities.

Beran said in a reflective voice, "I suppose they come seeking me."

"In that case," said Palafox, "it would be wise if you departed."

"Departed? Where?"

"Where I will take you."

"No," said Beran. "I will be your tool no more."

Palafox raised his eyebrows. "What do you lose? I am offering to save your life."

"Not through concern for my welfare."

"Of course not." Palafox grinned, showing his teeth in a momentary flash. "Who but a simpleton is so guided? I serve you in order to serve myself; with this understanding I suggest we now depart the inn. I do not care to appear overtly in this affair."

"No."

Palafox was roused to anger. He leaned forward, his nostrils flaring, his eyes like dark stars. Beran turned his head away. Palafox muttered in exasperation. Then he asked abruptly, "What do you want?"

"I want to become Panarch."

"Yes, of course," exclaimed Palafox. "Why else do you suppose I am here? Come, let us be off, or you will be no more than carrion."

Beran rose to his feet; they departed the inn.

X

THE TWO MEN flew south, across the countryside, rich with ancient habitancy; then over the seas, flecked with the sails of fishing craft. League after league they flew, and neither man spoke, each contained in his own thoughts.

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Beran finally broke the silence. "What is the process by which I become Panarch?"

Palafox said shortly, "The process began a month ago."

"The rumors?"

Palafox was perhaps irritated by the implied deprecation. He answered in a metallic voice. "It is necessary that the people of Pao realize that you exist."

"And why am I preferable to Bustamonte?"

Palafox laughed crisply. "In general outline, my interests would not be served by certain of Bustamonte's plans."

"And you hope that I will be more sympathetic to you?"

"You could not be more obstinate than Bustamonte."

"In what regard was Bustamonte obstinate?" Beran persisted. He refused to concede to all your desires?"

Palafox chuckled hollowly. "Ah, you young rascal! I believe you would deprive me of all my prerogatives."

Beran was silent, reflecting that if he ever became Panarch, this indeed would be one of his primary concerns.

Palafox spoke on in a more conciliatory tone. "These affairs are for the future, and need not concern us now. At the present we are allies. To signalize this fact, I have arranged that a modification be made upon your body, as soon as we arrive at Pon."

Beran was taken by surprise. "A modification?" He considered a moment, feeling a qualm of uneasiness. "Of what nature?"

"What modification would you prefer?" Palafox asked mildly.

Beran darted a glance at the hard profile. Palafox seemed completely serious. "The total use of my brain."

"Ah," said Palafox. "That is the most delicate and precise of all, and would require a year of toil on Breakness itself. At Pon it is impossible. Choose again."

"Evidently my life is to be one of many emergencies," said Beran. "The power of projecting energy from my hand might prove valuable."

"True," reflected Palafox. "And yet, on the other hand, what could more completely confuse your enemies than to see you rise into the air and float away? And since, with a novice, the easy projection of destruction endangers friends as well as enemies, we had better decide upon levitation as your first modification."

The surf-beaten cliffs of Nonamand rose from the ocean; they passed above a grimy fishing village, rode over the first ramparts of the Sgolaphs, flew low over the moors toward the central spine of the continent. Mount Droghead raised its cataclysmic crags; they swept close around the icy flanks, swerved down to the plateau of Pon.

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The car settled beside a long low building with rock-melt walls and a glass roof. Doors opened; Palafox floated the car within. They grounded on a floor of white tile; Palafox opened the port and motioned Beran out.

Beran hesitated, dubiously inspecting the four men who came forward. Each differed from the others in height, weight, skin and hair-color, but each was like the others.

"My sons," said Palafox. "Everywhere on Pao you will find my sons. . . But time is valuable, and we must set about your modification."

Beran alighted from the car; the sons of Palafox led him away. . .

THEY LAID Beran's anaesthetized body on a pallet, injected and impregnated the tissues with various toners and conditioners. Then standing far back, they flung a switch. There was a shrill whine, a flutter of violet light, a distortion of the space as if the scene was observed through moving panels of poor glass.

The whine died; the figures stepped forward around the body now stiff, dead, rigid. The flesh was hard, but elastic; the fluids were congealed; the joints firm.

The men worked swiftly, with exceeding deftness. They used knives with entering edges only six molecules thick. The knives cut without pressure, splitting the tissues into glass-smooth laminae. The body was laid open halfway up the back, slit down either side through the buttocks, thighs, calves. With single strokes of another type of knife, curiously singing, the soles of the feet were removed. The flesh was rigid, like rubber; there was no trace of blood or body fluid, no quiver of muscular motion.

A section of lung was cut out, an ovoid energy-bank introduced. Conductors were laid into the flesh, connecting to flexible transformers in the buttocks, to processors in the calves. The antigravity mesh was laid into the bottom of the feet and connected to the processors in the calves by means of flexible tubes thrust up through the feet.

The circuit was complete. It was tested and checked; a switch was installed under the skin of the left thigh. And now began the tedious job of restoring the body.

The soles were dipped in special stimulating fluid, returned precisely into place, with accuracy sufficient to bring cell wall opposite cell wall; severed artery tight to severed artery, nerve fibril against nerve fibril. The slits along the body were pressed tightly togethre, the flesh drawn back into place over the energy bank.

The four men now departed for rest, and the dead body lay alone in the darkness.

Next day the four men re-

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turned. The great machine whined again, and the violet light flickered around the room. The field which had gripped the atoms of Beran's body, in theory reducing his temperature to absolute zero, relaxed, and the molecules resumed their motion.

The body once more lived.

A week passed, while Beran, still comatose, healed. He returned to consciousness to find Palafox standing before the pallet.

"Rise," said Palafox. "Stand on your feet.

Beran slowly raised himself to his feet.

"Walk!"

Beran walked across the room. There was a tautness down his legs, and the energy-bulb weighed on the muscles of his diaphragm and rib-sheathing.

Palafox was keenly watching the motion of his feet. "Good," he exclaimed. "I see no halting or discoordination. Come with me."

He took Beran into a high room, hitched a harness over his shoulders, snapped a cord into a ring at his back.

"Feel here." He directed Beran's left hand to a spot on his thigh. "Tap."

Beran felt a vague solidity under his skin. He tapped. The floor ceased to press at his feet; his stomach jerked; his head felt like a balloon.

"This is charge one," said Palafox. "A repulsion of slightly less than one gravity, adjusted to cancel the centrifugal effect of planetary rotation."

He made the other end of the cord fast on a cleat. "Tap again."

Beran touched the plate, and instantly it seemed as if the entire envrionment had turned end for end, as if Palafox stood above him, glued to the ceiling, as if he were falling head-first at a floor thirty feet below him. He gasped, flailed out his arms; the cord caught him, held him from falling. He turned a desperate glance toward Palafox who stood faintly smiling.

"To increase the field, press the bottom of the plate," called Palafox. "To decrease, press the top. If you tap twice, the field goes dead."

Beran managed to return to the floor. The room righted, but swung and bobbed with nauseating effect.

"It will be hours before you accustom yourself to the levitation mesh," said Palafox briskly. "Since we have less than a day, I suggest that you practice the art diligently."

Beran started to reply, but Palafox silenced him with a gesture.

"Tomorrow," he said. "We enter the second phase of the program. The emotional environment is suitably sensitive: there is a general sense of expectation. Tomorrow, the quick stroke, the accomplishment! In a suitable man-

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ner we affirm the existence of the traditional Panarch. And then—" Palafox rose to his feet "—and then, who knows? Bustamonte may resign himself to the situation, or he may resist. I cannot predict. We will be prepared for either contingency."

Beran was not thawed by unexpected cordiality. "I would understand better had we discussed these plans over a period of time."

Palafox chuckled so genially that Beran stared in wonder. "Impossible, estimable Panarch. You must accept the fact that we here at Pon function as a General Staff. We have prepared dozens of programs of greater or less complexity, suitable for various situations. This is the first pattern of events to mesh with one of the plans."

"What, then, is the pattern of events?"

"Tomorrow three million persons attend the Pamalisthen Drones. You will appear, make yourself known. Television will convey your face and your words elsewhere on Pao."

"Tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow."

Beran chewed his lips, angry both at his own uneasiness and at Palafox's indomitable affability. "What exactly is the program?"

"It is of the utmost simplicity. The Drones commence at an hour after dawn and continue until noon. At this time is the pause. There will be a rumor-passing, and you will be expected. You will appear wearing Black. You will speak." Palafox handed Beran a sheet of paper. "These few sentences should be sufficient."

Beran dubiously glanced down the lines of script. "I hope events work out as you plan. I want no bloodshed, no violence."

Palafox shrugged. "It is impossible to foretell the future. If things go well, no one will suffer except Bustamonte."

"And if things go poorly?"

Palafox laughed. "The ocean bottom is the rendezvous for those who plan poorly."

XI

ACROSS THE Hyaline Gulf from Eiljanre was Mathiole, a region of special and peculiar glamour. There were romantic dells and waterfalls, mountains which swept across the sky with dashing and delicate outlines. The trees of the land grew with a distinctive flair, the flowers glowed with prismatic light, the waters seemed derived from dew. In the folk-tales of early Pao, when episodes of fantasy and romance occurred, Mathiole was inevitably the locale.

To the south of Mathiole was the Pamalisthen, a verdant plain of farms and orchards arranged like pleasure-glades. Here were

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seven cities, forming the apices of a great heptagon; and at the very center was Festival Field, where drones took place. Among all the numerous gatherings, convocations and grand massings of Pao, the Pamalisthen Drones were accorded the highest prestige.

Long before dawn, on the Eighth Day of the Eighth Week of the Eighth Month, Festival Field began to fill. Small fires flickered by the thousands; a susurration rose from the plain.

With dawn came throngs more: families gravely gay, in the Paonese fashion. The small children wore clean white smocks, the adolescents school uniforms with various blazons on their shoulders, the adults in the styles and colors befitting their place in society.

The sun rose, generating the blue, white and yellow of a Paonese day. The crowds pressed into the field: millions of individuals standing shoulder to shoulder, speaking only in hushed whispers, but for the most part silent, each person testing his identification with the crowd, adding his soul to the amalgam, withdrawing a sense of rapturous strength.

The first whispers of the drone began: long sighs of sound, intervals of silence between. The sighs grew louder and the silences shorter, and presently the drones were in full pitch—a harmony of three million parts, shifting and fluctuating, but always of definite emotional texture, and in moods stately and abstract.

Hours passed, the drones grew higher in pitch, rather more insistent and urgent. When the sun was two-thirds up the sky, a long black saloon-flyer appeared from the direction of Eiljanre. It sank quietly to a low eminence at the far end of the field. Those who had taken places here were thrust down into the plain, barely escaping the descending hull. A few curious loitered, peering in through the glistening ports. A squad of neutraloids in magenta and blue, debarked and drove them off with silent efficiency.

Four servants brought forth first a black and brown carpet, then a polished black wooden chair with black cushioning.

Across the plain, the drones took on a subtly different character, perceptible only to a Paonese ear.

Bustamonte, emerging from the black saloon, was Paonese. He perceived and understood. His round white face compacted into a frown, he glanced from right to left across the multitude as if seeking one to fix guilt upon.

The drones continued. The mode changed once more as if Bustamonte's arrival were no more than a transient trifle—a slight more pungent, even, than

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the original chord of dislike and mockery.

Down the ordained progression of changes went the drones. Shortly before noon the sound ceased. The crowd quivered and moved; a sigh of satisfied achievement rose and died. The crowd changed color and texture, as all who could do so squatted to the ground.

Bustamonte grasped the arms of his chair to rise. The crowd was in its most receptive state, sensitized and aware. He clocked on his shoulder microphone, stepped forward to speak.

A great gasp came from the plain, a sound of vast astonishment and delight.

All eyes were fixed on the sky over Bustamonte's head, where a great rectangle of rippling black velvet had appeared, bearing the blazon of the Panasper Dynasty. Below, in mid-air, stood a solitary figure. He wore short black trousers, black boots, and a rakish black cape clipped over one shoulder. He spoke; the sound echoed over all Festival Field.

"Paonese: I am your Panarch. I am Beran, son to Aiello, scion of the ancient Panasper Dynasty. Many years I have lived in exile, growing to my maturity. Bustamonte has served as Ayudor. He has made mistakes; now I have come to supersede him. I hereby call on Bustamonte to acknowledge me, to make an orderly transfer of authority. Bustamonte, speak!"

Bustamonte had already spoken. A dozen neutraloids ran forward with rifles, knelt, aimed. Lances of white fire raced up to converge on the figure in black. The figure seemed to shatter, to explode; the crowd gasped in shock.

The fire-lances turned against the black rectangle, but this appeared impervious to the energy. Bustamonte swaggered truculently forward. "This is the fate meted to idiots, charlatans and all those who would violate the justice of the government. The impostor, as you have seen—"

Beran's voice came down from the sky. "You shattered only my image, Bustamonte. You must acknowledge me: I am Beran, Panarch of Pao."

"Beran does not exist!" roared Bustamonte. "Beran died with Aiello!"

"I am Beran. I am alive. Here and now you and I will take truth-drug, and any who wishes may question us and bring forth the truth. Do you agree?"

Bustamonte hesitated. The crowd roared. Bustamonte glared like a bear in a cave. He turned, spoke terse orders to one of his ministers. He had neglected to turn off his microphone; the words were clearly heard by three million people. "Call for police-craft. Seal this area. He must be killed."

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The crowd-noise rose and fell, and rose again, at the implicit acknowledgement. Bustamonte tore off the microphone, barked further orders, waving his hands toward the crowd. The minister hesitated, seemed to demur. Bustamonte turned, marched to the black saloon. Behind came his retinue, crowding into the craft.

The crowd murmured, and then as if by a single thought, decided to leave Festival Field. In the center, at the most concentrated node, the sense of constriction was strongest. Faces twisted and turned; from a distance the effect was rapid pale twinkling.

A milling motion began. Families were wedged apart, pushed away from each other. Then shouts and calls were the components of a growing hoarse sound. The fear became palpable; the pleasant field grew acrid with the scent.

Overhead the black rectangle disappeared, the sky was clear. The crowd felt exposed; the shoving became trampling; the trampling became panic. Screaming began to sound; the noise bred hysteria; Paonese men and women climbed over each other, walking on squirming flesh.

Overhead appeared the police craft. They cruised back and forth like sharks; the panic became madness; the screams became a continuous shrieking. But the crowd at the periphery was fleeing, swarming along the various roads and lanes, dispersing across the fields. The police craft swept back and forth indecisively; then turned and departed the scene. For moments the panic persisted; then the crowd came to its senses. The screams became moans, and the fear became grief . . .

Beran seemed to have shrunk, collapsed in on himself. He was pallid, bright-eyed with horror. "Why could we not have foreseen such an event? We are as guilty as Bustamonte!"

"It serves no purpose to become infected with emotion," said Palafox.

Beran made no response. He sat crouched, staring into space.

The countryside of South Minamand fell astern. They crossed the long narrow Serpent, the island Fraevarth with its bone-white villages, and swept out over the Great Sea of the South. There was a period when nothing could be seen but rolling gray water; then the ramparts of Nonamand rose into view, with the eternal white surf crushing at the base. Then the moors and the Sgolath crags, then around Mount Drog-head to settle on the desolate plateau.

In Palafox's rooms they drank spiced tea, Palafox sitting in a tall-backed chair before a desk,

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Beran standing glumly by a window.

"You must steel yourself to unpleasant deeds," said Palafox matter-of-factly. "There will be many more before the issues are resolved."

They went out on a rooftop, under a transparent dome.

"There," said Palafox, pointing at the sky: "Bustamonte's miserable gesture of ill-will."

A dozen of the Mamarone sky-sleds showed as black rectangles on the streaked gray sky. Two miles away a transport had settled and was exuding a magenta clot of neutralid troops.

"It is well that this episode occurred," said Palafox. "It may dissuade Bustamonte from another like impertinence." He tilted his head, listening to the inner sound. "Now—observe our deterrent against molestation!"

Beran felt, or perhaps heard, a pulsating whine, so shrill as to be only partially in perception.

The sky-sleds began to act peculiarly, sinking, rising, jostling. They turned and fled precipitously. At the same time, there was excitement among the troops. They were in disarray, flourishing their arms, bobbing and hopping. The pulsating whine died; the Mamarone collapsed on the ground.

Palafox smiled faintly. "They were unlikely to annoy us further."

"Bustamonte might try to bomb us."

"If he is wise," said Palafox negligently, "he will attempt nothing so drastic. And he is wise at least to that extent."

"Then what will he do!"

"Oh—the usual futilities of a ruler who sees his regnum dwindling . . ."

Bustamonte's measures in truth were stupid and harsh. The news of Beran's appearance flew around the eight continents, in spite of Bustamonte's efforts to discredit the occurrence. The Paonese, on the one hand drawn by their yearning for the traditional, on the other repelled by Bustamonte's sociological novelties, reacted in the customary style. Work slowed, halted. Cooperation with civil authority ceased entirely.

Bustamonte at random picked half a hundred villages. Mamarone descended upon these communities and were allowed complete license. Sadism was a prominent facet of the neutraloid nature, a substitute for creativity. They were sufficiently ingenious, and they hated natural men and women. The combination produced the most hideous events yet known on Pao.

Atrocity failed to move the population—already an established principle of Paonese history. Beran, learning of the terrible deeds, felt all the anguish of

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the victims. He turned on Palafox, reviled him.

Palafox, unmoved, commented that all men die, that pain is transitory and in any event the result of faulty mental discipline. To demonstrate, he held his hand in a flame; the flesh burnt and crackled; Palafox watched without concern.

"These people lack this discipline; they feel pain!" cried Beran.

"It is indeed unfortunate," said Palafox. "I wish pain to no man, but until Bustamonte is deposed —or until he is dead—these episodes will continue. There is no way we can prevent them."

"Why do you not restrain these monsters?" raged Beran. "You have the means. You are as guilty as he is!"

"The word 'guilt' implies uncertainty," said Palafox. "I cannot profess to omniscience; but I plan as well as I can, and regard these plans as definite. I am not uncertain; I am not guilty. And in any event, you can restrain Bustamonte as readily as I."

Beran replied with fury and scorn. "I understand you now. You want me to kill him. Perhaps you have planned this entire series of events. I will kill him gladly! Arm me, tell me his whereabouts—if I die, at least there shall be an end to all."

"Come," said Palafox, "you receive your second modification."

XII

BUSTAMONTE was shrunken and haggard. He paced the black carpet of the foyer, holding his arms stiff, fluttering his fingers as if to shake off bits of grit.

The glass door was closed, locked, sealed. Outside stood four black Mamarone.

Bustamonte shivered. Where would it end? He went to the window, looked out into the night. Eiljanre spread ghostly white to all sides. Three points on the horizon glowed angry maroon where three villages and those who had dwelt there felt the weight of his vengeance.

Bustamonte groaned, chewed his lip, fluttered his fingers spasmodically. He turned away from the window, resumed his pacing. At the window there was a faint hiss which Bustamonte failed to notice.

There was a thud, a draft of air.

Bustamonte turned, froze in his tracks. In the window stood a young man, wearing black.

"Beran," croaked Bustamonte. *"Beran!"*

Beran jumped down to the black carpet, came quietly forward. Bustamonte tried to turn tried to scuttle and dodge. But his time had come. He knew it, but he could not move. His knees went limp, his bowels churned, relaxed.

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Beran raised his hand. From his finger darted blue energy.

The affair was accomplished. Beran stepped over the corpse, unsealed the glass doors, flung them aside.

The Mamarone looked around, sprang back, squinted in wonder.

"I am Beran Panasper, Panarch of Pao."

PAO celebrated the accession of Beran in a frenzy of joy. Everywhere, except in the Valiant camps, along the shore of Zelambre Bay, at Pon, there was rejoicing of so orgiastic a nature as to seem non-Paonese.

During the next few days Beran pondered at great length. Palafox seemed to regard him as a predictable quantity, one which would automatically react in a direction favorable to Palafox. This consideration moved him to caution and he delayed immediate action against the three non-Paonese enclaves. In any event there was sufficient other scope for his energy.

Bustamonte's splendid harem he sent packing, and began the formation of his own. It was expected of him; a Panarch without suitable concubines would be regarded with suspicion and his masculinity called to question.

Beran felt no disinclination on this score, and since he was young, well-favored, and a popular hero, his problem was not so

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much one of seeking as of selection.

However, the affairs of state left him little time for personal indulgence. Bustamonte had overcrowded the penal colony on Vredeltope, with criminals and with political offenders mingled indiscriminately.

Beran ordered an amnesty for all except confirmed felons. In the latter part of his reign, Bustamonte likewise had raised taxes until they approached those of Aiello's reign, with peculant officials absorbing the increment. Beran dealt decisively with these, setting the peculators to unpleasant types of menial labor, with earnings applied to their debts.

One day, without warning, a red, blue and brown corvette dropped down from space. The sector monitor issued the customary challenge; the corvette, disdaining response other than to break out a long serpent-tongue banderole, and landed with insolent carelessness on the roof of the Grand Palace.

Eban Buzbek, Hetman of the Batmarsh Brumbos and a retinue of warriors debarked. Ignoring the palace preceptors, they marched to the great throne-room, called loudly for Bustamonte.

Beran, arrayed in formal black, entered the hall.

By this time Eban Buzbek had heard a report of Bustamonte's death. He gave Beran a hard quizzical stare, then called to an interpreter. "Inquire if the new Panarch acknowledges his obligations to us."

To the interpreter's timid question, Beran made no immediate reply. Conflict was the least of his desires; yet tribute was a humiliation he did not wish to prolong.

Eban Buzbek barked out, "What is the new Panarch's reply?"

The interpreter translated.

"In truth," said Beran in a troubled voice, "I have no reply ready. I wish to reign in peace, still I feel that the tribute to Batmarsh has been paid long enough."

Eban Buzbek roared a quick gust of laughter when he heard the interpreter's translation. "This is not the manner in which realities arrange themselves. Life is a pyramid; only one may stand at the top. In this case it is I."

Eban Buzbek ordered a banquet set before him and demanded women. These were supplied from the harlots' guild-house and the Batch clansmen passed a merry evening.

Beran, trembling with anger, went to the quarters of Palafox who displayed no great interest at the news. "You acted correctly," he said. "It is hopeless quixotry to defy such experienced warriors."

Beran assented gloomily. "It's useless to deny that Pao needs

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protection against brigands . . . Still, we are well able to afford the tribute, and it is cheaper than maintaining a large military establishment."

Palafox agreed. "The tribute is a decided economy."

Beran searched the long lean face for the irony he suspected, but finding none, took his leave.

The next day, after the Brumbos had departed, he called for a map of Shraimand, and studied the disposition of the Valiant camps. They occupied a strip along the coast ten miles wide by a hundred long, although the hinterland area had been depopulated another ten miles in anticipation of their increase.

Recalling his term of duty at Deirombona, Beran remembered the ardent young men and women, the tense faces, the steady undeviating expressions, the dedication to glory . . . He sighed. Such traits had their uses. These were men and women of Paonese blood! If only they spoke the true language, shared the ancient traditions! In this case, he reflected sadly, they would no longer be warriors . . .

But such enclaves were intolerable. Tribute or no tribute, the Valiant camps must be abandoned, the Myrmidons re-educated and merged with the rest of the population. Yet, after preparing the decree which would activate this principle, he hesitated, and finally put it aside.

He called Palafox to him, and began arguing heatedly, although Palafox had said nothing. "Theoretically, I agree to the need for an army, and also an efficient industrial establishment. But Bustamonte's procedure is cruel, artificial, disruptive!"

Palafox spoke gravely. "Suppose that by some miracle you were able to recruit, train and indoctrinate a Paonese army—then what? Whence will come their weapons? Who will supply warships? Who will build instruments and communications equipment?"

"Mercantile is the present source of our needs," Beran said slowly. "Perhaps one of the out-cluster worlds might supply us."

"The Mercantile will never conspire against the Brumbos," said Palafox. "And to procure merchandise from an out-cluster world, you must pay in suitable exchange. To acquire this foreign exchange, you must engage in trading."

Beran gazed bleakly from the window. "When we have no cargo-ships, we can not trade."

"Precisely true," said Palafox, in high good humor. "Come, I would show you something of which you are perhaps not aware."

In a swift black torpedo, Palafox and Beran flew to Zelambre

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Bay. In spite of Beran's questions, Palafox said nothing. He took Beran to the eastern shore, to an isolated area at the root of Maesthgelai Peninsula. Here was a group of new buildings, stark and ugly. Palafox landed the boat, took Beran inside the largest. They stood before a long cylinder.

Palafox said, "This is the secret project of a group of advanced students. As you have deduced, it is a small space-ship. The first, so I believe, ever built on Pao."

Beran surveyed the vessel without comment. Clearly Palafox was playing him as a fisherman plays a fish; it was impossible not to feel resentment.

"Naturally, I am—gratified," said Beran reluctantly. "But why was this work held secret from me?"

Palafox held up his hand and spoke in a soothing voice. "There was no attempt to keep you from knowledge. This is one project of many; these young men and women attack the problems and lacks of Pao with tremendous energy. Every day they undertake something new.

Beran made no reply. Palafox signalled to the quietly observing group of Technicants. They came forward, were introduced, showed mild surprise when Beran spoke to them in their own language, and presently conducted him through the ship. The interior reinforced Beran's original conception of rough but sturdy serviceability.

And when he returned to the Grand Palace it was with an entirely new set of doubts and speculations in his mind. Could it be possible that Bustamonte had been right, and he, Beran, wrong? The miseries inflicted upon the displaced Paonese, on the indentured girls, on the children abstracted from the rich old culture of Pao and trained in raw new ways—were they after all justifiable means to a necessary end? The question was one which Beran could not answer. But when he once again considered the decree which merged the neolingual enclaves with the rest of Pao, again he set it aside.

XIII

A YEAR went by. The prototype space-ship of the Technicants was completed, tested and put into service as a training ship. On plea of the Technicant Coordinating Council, public funds were diverted to a large-scale ship-building program.

Valiant activity proceeded as before. A dozen times Beran decided to curtail the scope of the camps, but on each occasion the face of Eban Buzbek appeared to his mind's eye and his resolve diminished.

Another year passed, and down

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from space came the gay-colored corvette of Eban Buzbek. As before, it ignored the challenge of the monitor, and landed on the roof-deck of the Grand Palace. As before, Eban Buzbek and a swaggering retinue marched to the great hall, where they demanded the presence of Beran. There was a delay of ten minutes, during which the warriors stamped and jingled impatiently.

Beran entered the room, and halted, surveying the clansmen, who halted their restless motion and turned cold-eyed faces toward him. Beran came forward. He made no pretense of cordiality.

"Why do you come to Pao this time?" he asked.

As before, an interpreter transferred the words into Batch.

Eban Buzbek sat back into a chair, motioned Beran to another nearby. Beran took the seat without comment.

"We have heard unpleasant reports," said Eban Buzbek, stretching forth his legs. "Our allies and suppliers, the artifactors of Mercantile tell us that you have lately sent into a space a fleet of cargo-vessels—that you bargain and barter, and eventually bring back to Pao great quantities of technical equipment."

Beran's eyes focussed on the broad red face of Eban Buzbek. He raised himself in his seat. "I am happy you are here, Eban Buzbek. It is better that we talk face to face. The time has come when Pao pays no further tribute to you."

Eban Buzbek's mouth opened, curved into a comical grimace of surprise.

"Furthermore, we shall continue to send our ships across the universe. I hope you will accept these facts in good spirit and return to your world with peace in your heart."

Eban Buzbek sprang to his feet. "I will return with your ears to hang in our Hall of Arms."

Beran rose, backed away from the warriors. They advanced with grinning deliberation. Eban Buzbek pulled a blade from his belt. "Bring the rascal here," he cried.

Beran raised his hand in a signal. Doors slid back on three sides; three squads of Mamarone came forward, their eyes like slits. They carried halberds with cusped blades a yard long, mounted with flame sickles.

"What is your will with these jackals?" the sergeant rasped.

Beran said, "Subaqueation. Take them to the ocean."

Eban Buzbek demanded the sense of the comments from the interpreter. On hearing it, he sputtered, "This is a reckless act. Pao shall be devastated! My kinsmen will leave no living soul in Eiljanre; we shall sow your fields with fire and bone!"

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"Will you then go home in peace and bother us no more?" Beran demanded. "Come, the choice is yours. Death—or peace."

Eban Buzbek looked from right to left; his warriors pressed close together, eyeing their black adversaries.

Eban Buzbek sheathed his blade with a decisive snap. He muttered aside to his men. "We go," he said to Beran.

"Then you choose peace?"

Eban Buzbek's mustaches quivered in fury. "I choose—peace."

"Then throw down your weapons, leave Pao and never return."

Eban Buzbek, wooden-faced, divested himself of his arms. His warriors followed suit. The group departed, herded by the neutraloids. Presently the corvette rose from the palace, darted up and away.

Minutes passed; then Beran was called to the telescreen. Eban Buzbek's face glowed, glistening with hate. "I left in peace, young Panarch, and you shall have peace—only so long as it takes to bring the clansmen back to Pao. Not only your ears but your head will be mounted among our trophies."

Beran said, "Come at your own risk." He motioned; the screen went blank; he left the room and retired to his chambers . . .

Three months later the Batch clansmen attacked Pao. A fleet of twenty-eight warships, including six round-bellied transports, appeared in the sky. The monitors made no attempt either to challenge or defend, and the Batch warships slid contemptuously down into the atmosphere, their rocket tubes flaming.

Here they were attacked by rocket-missiles, but counter-missiles harmlessly exploded the barrage.

In tight formation, they settled toward north Minamand and landed a score of miles north of Eiljanre. The transports debarked a multitude of clansmen mounted on air scooters. They darted high into the air, dashing, cavorting, swerving in a fine display of braggadocio.

A school of explosive missiles came streaking for them, but the defenses of the ships below were alert, and anti-missiles destroyed the salvo. However, the threat was sufficient to hold the riders close to the flotilla.

Evening came and night. The riders wrote vainglorious slogans in the sky with golden gas, then retired to their ships, and there was no further activity.

Another set of events had already occurred on Batmarsh. No sooner had the twenty-eight ship flotilla set forth for Pao, when another ship, cylindrical and sturdy, evidently converted from a cargo-carrier, dropped down

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into the dank forested hills at the south end of the Brumbo domain.

A hundred young men disembarked. They wore ingenious segmented suits of transpar, which became streamlined shells when the wearer's arms hung by his sides. Anti-gravity mesh made them weightless, electric jets propelled them with great speed.

They flew low over the black trees, along the bottom of the wild valleys. Lake Chagaz glimmered ahead, reflecting the glowing constellations of the cluster. Across the lake was the stone and timber city Slagoe, with the Hall of Honors looming tall over the lesser buildings.

The flyers swooped like hawks to the ground. Four ran to the sacred fire, beat down the aged fire-tenders, quenched the blaze except for a single coal which they packed in a metal pouch. The remainder had continued past up the ten stone steps. They stunned the guardian vestals, charged into the tall smoky-beamed hall.

Down from the wall came the tapestry of the clan, woven with hair from the head of every Brumbo born to the clan. Helter-skelter into bags and gravity boxes went the trophies, the sacred fetishes: old armor, a hundred tattered banners, scrolls and declamations, fragments of rock, bone, steel and charcoal, vials of dried black blood commemorating battles and Brumbo valor.

When Slagoe at last awoke to what was taking place the warriors were in space, bound for Pao. Women, youths, old men, ran to the sacred park, crying and shouting.

But the raiders had departed, taking with them the soul of the clan, all the most precious treasure.

On dawn of the second day the raiders brought forth crates and assembled eight battle-platforms, mounting generators, anti-missile defenses, dynamic stings, pyreumators and sonic ear-blasters.

Other Brumbo bravos came forth on air-scooters, but now they rode in strict formation. The battle platforms raised from the ground and exploded. Mechanical moles, tunneling through the soil, had planted mines to the bottom of each raft.

The air-scooter cavalry milled in consternation. Without protection they were easy targets for missiles—cowardly weapons by the standards of Batmarsh.

The Valiant Myrmidons likewise disliked missiles. Beran had insisted on every possible means to minimize bloodshed, but when the battle-rafts were destroyed, he found it impossible to restrain the Myrmidons. In their transpar shells they darted into the sky and plunged down at the Brumbo cavalry. A furious battle swirled

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and screamed over the pleasant countryside.

There was no decision to the battle. Myrmidons and Brumbo air-scooters fell in equal numbers, but after twenty minutes, the air-scooters suddenly disengaged and plunged to the ground, leaving the Myrmidons exposed to a barrage of missiles. The Myrmidons were not taken entirely unawares, and dove headfirst for the ground. Only a few laggards—perhaps twenty—were caught and exploded.

The rest retreated under the shadow of their ships and the Myrmidons withdrew. They had been fewer than the Brumbos; nevertheless, the clansmen had given way, puzzled and awed by the ferocity of the resistance.

The remainder of the day was quiet, likewise the next day, while the Brumbos sounded and probed under the hulls of their ships to disengage any mines which might have been planted there.

This accomplished, the fleet rose into the air, lumbered out over the Hylanthus Sea, crossed the isthmus just south of Eiljanre, settled on the beach within sight of the Grand Palace.

The next morning the Brumbos came forth on foot, six thousand men guarded by anti-missile defenders and four projectors. They moved cautiously forward, directly for the Grand Palace.

There was no show of resistance, no sign of the Myrmidons. The marble walls of the Grand Palace rose over them. There was motion on top; down rolled a rectangle of black, brown and tawny cloth. The Brumbos halted, staring.

An amplified voice came from the palace. "Eban Buzbek—come forth. Come inspect the loot we have taken from your Hall of Honors. Come forth, Eban Buzbek; no harm shall come to you."

Eban Buzbek came forth. As he advanced he demanded through an amplifier, "What is this fakery? What cowardly Paonese trick have you contrived? I will not listen long."

"We possess all your clan treasures, Eban Buzbek: that tapestry, the last coal of your Eternal Fire, all your heraldry and relicts. Do you wish to redeem them?"

Eban Buzbek stood swaying as if he would faint. He turned and walked unsteadily back to his ship.

An hour passed. Eban Buzbek and a group of noblemen came forth. "We request a truce, in order that we may inspect these articles you claim to have in your possession."

"Come forward, Eban Buzbek. Inspect to your heart's content."

Eban Buzbek and his retinue inspected the articles. They spoke no word; the Paonese who conducted them made no comment.

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The Brumbos silently returned to their ships.

A nunciator called, "The time is at hand! Coward Paonese—prepare for death!"

The clansmen charged, driven by the most violent emotion. Halfway across the beach they were met by the Myrmidons, and engaged in hand to hand combat, with knives, small powder weapons and bare hands.

The Brumbos were halted; for the first time their battle-lust met another more intense. They knew fear, they fell aback, they retreated.

The voice from the Grand Palace called out, "You cannot win, Eban Buzbek. You cannot escape. We hold your lives, we hold your sacred treasures. Surrender now or we destroy both."

Eban Buzbek surrendered. He bent his head to the ground before Beran and the Myrmidon captain, he renounced all claim to Paonese overlordship, and kneeling before the sacred tapestry swore never more to molest or plan harm against Pao. He was then permitted the treasures of his clan, which the sullen clansmen carried aboard the flotilla.

Eban Buzbek turned abruptly to Beran. "You have defeated us in craft as well as valor. It is a small heart therefore which would hold hate against you. I leave Pao feeling only woe that we have met a band of warriors more skillful and more gallant than we. From what far planet did you recruit them, that we may give them all possible avoidance?"

Beran smiled with mingled pride and misgiving. "They are from no far planet; they are Paonese."

Eban Buzbek was shocked. He gave Beran a hard stare. "Paonese? Surely not, for I have heard them speak, and the language is not Paonese."

"Nevertheless, Paonese is their blood. If you doubt, I can direct you to their camp, or you may question them yourself through an interpreter."

Beran signalled to one of the Interpreter Corps, who was never far distant during these times. But Eban Buzbek declined the opportunity. He boarded the flagship of his flotilla, and so departed Pao.

XIV

A MONTH later Beran made his most audacious move. It was directed against Palafox himself, and was an open act of defiance.

At the eastern outskirts of Eiljanre, across the old Rovenone Canal, lay a wide commons, used principally for the flying of kites and festival mass-dancing. Here Beran ordered the erection of a large tent-pavilion, where women wishing to hire themselves to the Cogitants might exhibit themselves. Wide publicity had been

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given the new agency, and also to an edict that all *private* contracts between women and Cogitants would henceforth be illegal and felonious.

The opening day arrived. At noon Beran went to inspect the pavilion. Construction was in the best tradition of Paonese craftmanship. Pillars plaited of glass ropes supported a red velvet parasol, the floor was clean shell crushed into a matrix of blue gel. Around the wall were benches and booths of blackwood, comprising accommodation for four hundred applicants and sixty Cogitants.

On the benches sat a scattered handful of women, a miserable group by any standards, unlovely, harassed, peaked—perhaps thirty in all.

Beran stared in surprise. "Is this the lot of them?"

"That is all Panarch!"

Beran rubbed his chin ruefully. He looked around to see the man he wished least to see: Palafox.

Beran spoke first, with some effort. "Choose, Lord Palafox. Thirty of Pao's most charming women await your whim."

Palafox replied in a light voice. "Slaughtered and buried, they might make acceptable fertilizer. Other than that, I see no possible use for them." He peered to left and right. "Where are the hundreds of prime maidens you promised to display? I see only these charwomen and empty benches."

Implicit in the remark was a challenge; failure to recognize and answer it was to abandon the initiative. "It appears, Lord Palafox," said Beran, "that indenture to the Cogitants is as objectionable to the women of Pao as I had supposed. The very dearth of persons vindicates my decision." And Beran contemplated the lonely pavilion.

There was no sound from Palafox, but some intuition flashed a warning to Beran's mind. He turned his head, and his startled eyes saw Palafox, face like a death-mask, raising his hand. The forefinger pointed, Beran flung himself flat. A blue streak sizzled overhead. He pointed his hand; his own finger-fire spat forward, ran up Palafox's arm, through the elbow, the humerus and out the shoulder.

Palafox jerked his head up, mouth clenched, eyes rolled back like a maddened horse. Blood sizzled and steamed where the mangled circuits in his arm had heated, fused and broken.

Beran pointed his finger once more; it was urgent and advisable to kill Palafox; more than this, it was his duty. Palafox stood watching, the look in his eyes no longer that of a human being; he stood waiting for death.

Beran hesitated, and in this instant, Palafox once more became a man. He flung up his left hand;

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now Beran acted and again the blue fire-pencil leapt forth; but it impinged on an essence which the left hand of Palafox had flung forth, and dissolved.

Beran drew back. The thirty women had flung themselves quaking and whimpering to the floor; Beran's attendants stood lax and limp. There was no word spoken. Palafox backed away, out the door of the pavilion; he turned and was gone.

A half hour later, Beran went to his wardrobe, dressed in a suit of skin-tight black. He armed himself with knife, hammer-beam, mind-blinder, swallowed a pellet of nerve-tonic, then unobtrusively made his way to the roof-deck.

He slipped into an air-car, wafted high into the night and flew south.

The dreary cliffs of Nonamand rose from the sea with phosphorescent surf at the base and a few wan lights flickering along the top. Beran adjusted his course over the dark upland moors toward Pon. Grim and tense he sat, riding with the conviction that doom lay before him. Far from making him uneasy, the prospect filled him with a ghastly exhilaration. Flying over the bleak moors, he felt like a man already dead, a ghost, a fleeting wraith.

There: Mount Droghead, and beyond, the Institute! Every building, every terrace, walk, outbuilding and dormitory, was familiar to Beran: the years he had served here as interpreter would now stand him in good stead.

Beran alighted on the pale rock-melt of the dormitory roof. The wind swept past, droning and whistling; there was no other sound.

Beran ran for the roof door. He burnt out the seal with a flicker of finger-fire, slid the door back, entered the hall.

The dormitory was silent; he could hear neither voice nor movement. He set out down the corridor with long swift steps.

The top floor was given over to the day rooms, and was deserted. He descended a ramp, turned to the right, toward the source of the light he had seen from above. He stopped outside a door, listened. No voices—but a faint sense of motion within: a stir, a shuffle.

He touched the latch. The door was sealed.

Beran readied himself. All must go swiftly. Now! Flick of fire, door free, door aside—stride forward! And there in the chair beside the table, a man.

The man looked up, Beran stopped short. It was not Palafox. It was Finisterle.

Finisterle looked at the pointed finger, then up to Beran's face. "What do you do here?" His exclamation was in Pastiche, and in this tongue Beran replied.

"Where is Palafox?"

Finisterle laughed weakly, let

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himself sink back into the chair. "It seems as if I nearly met the fate of my sire."

Beran came a step closer. "Where is Palafox?"

"You are too late. Palafox is gone to Breakness."

"Breakness!" Beran felt limp and tired.

"He is broken, his arm is a shred. No one here can repair him." Finisterle appraised Beran with cautious interest. "And this the unobtrusive Beran—a demon in black!"

Beran clenched his fists, beat them together. "Who could do it but I?" He glanced suddenly at Finisterle. "You are not deceiving me?"

Finisterle shook his head. "Why should I deceive you?"

"He is your sire!"

Finisterle shrugged. "This means nothing, either to sire or to son."

Beran slowly seated himself in a nearby chair, watching Finisterle all the while. "The death of Palafox is hardly to your advantage."

Finisterle made a non-committal gesture. "A man, no matter how remarkable, has only a finite capability. It is no longer a secret that Lord Palafox has come to the margin, and indeed, has passed beyond. He has succumbed to the final sickness, he is an Emeritus. The world and his brain are no longer separate; to Palafox they are one and the same."

Beran rubbed his chin, frowned. Finisterle leaned forward. "Do you know his ambition, do you understand his presence on Pao?"

"I guess, but I do not know."

"Some weeks ago he gathered together his sons. He spoke to us, explained his ambition. He claims Pao as a world of his own. Through his sons, his grandsons, and his own capabilities, he will outbreed the Paonese, until eventually there will be only Palafox and the seed of Palafox on Pao."

Beran heaved a deep sigh. "How long will he stay on Breakness?"

"Who knows? His arm is mangled; there is much repair to be done."

Beran rose heavily to his feet.

"What will you do now?" asked Finisterle.

"I am Paonese," said Beran "I have been passive in the Paonese fashion. But I have also studied at Breakness Institute, and now I shall act. And if I destroy what Palafox has worked so long to build—perhaps he will not return." He looked around the room. "I will start here, at Pon. You all may go where you will—but go you must. Tomorrow the Institute will be destroyed."

Finisterle leapt to his feet, restraint forgotten. "Tomorrow?" That is fantastic! We can not leave our research, our library, our precious possessions!"

Beran went to the doorway.

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"There will be no more delay. You certainly have the right to remove your personal property. But the entity known as the Cogitant Institute will vanish tomorrow."

ESTEBAN CARBONE, Chief Marshall of the Valiants, a muscular young man with an open pleasant face, was accustomed to rise at dawn for a plunge into the surf.

On this morning he returned naked, wet and breathless from the beach, to find a silent man in black awaiting him.

Esteban Carbone halted in confusion. "Panarch, as you see, I am surprised. Pray excuse me while I clothe myself."

He ran into his quarters, and presently reappeared in a striking black and yellow uniform. "Now, Supremacy, I am ready to hear your commands."

"They are brief," said Beran. "Take a warship to Pon, and at twelve noon, destroy Cogitant Institute."

Esteban Carbone's amazement reached new heights. "Do I understand you correctly, Supremacy?"

"I will repeat: take a warship to Pon, destroy Cogitant Institute. Explode it to splinters. The Cogitants have received notice; they are now evacuating."

Esteban Carbone hesitated a perceptible instant before replying. "It is not my place to question matters of policy, but is this not a very drastic act? I feel impelled to counsel careful second thought."

Beran took no offense. "I appreciate your concern. This order however is the result of many more thoughts than two. Be so good as to obey without further delay."

Esteban Carbone touched his hand to his forehead, bowed low. "Nothing more need be said, Panarch Beran." He walked into his quarters, spoke into a communicator.

Beran watched the warship, a barrel-shaped black hulk, wallow up into the sky and head south. Then he went slowly to his aircar and returned to Eiljanre.

At noon precisely the warship hurled an explosive missile at the target, a small cluster of white buildings on the plateau behind Mount Droghead. There was a dazzle of blue and white, and Cogitant Institute was gone.

When Palafox heard the news, his face suffused with dark blood; he swayed back and forth. "So does he destroy himself," he groaned between his teeth. "So should I be satisfied—but how bitter the insolence of this young coxcomb!"

The Cogitants came to Eiljanre, settling in the old Beauclare Quarter, south of the Rovenone. As the months passed they underwent a change, almost, it seemed, with an air of joyous relief. They relaxed the doctrinaire intensity which had distinguished them at the Institute,

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and fell into the ways of a bohemian intelligentsia. Through some obscure compulsion, they spoke little or no Cogitant, and likewise, disdaining Paonese, conducted all their affairs in Pastiche.

XV

BERAN PANASPER, Panarch of Pao, sat in the rotunda of the pink-colonnaded lodge on Pergolai, in the same black chair where his father Aiello had died.

The other places around the carved ivory table were vacant; no one was present but a pair of black-dyed neutraloids, looming outside the door.

Presently there was motion at the door, the Mamarone's challenge in voices like ripping cloth. Beran identified the visitor, signaled the Mamarones to open.

Finisterle entered the room, gravely deigning no notice of the hulking black shapes. He stopped in the center of the room, inspected Beran from head to foot. He spoke in Pastiche, his words wry and pungent as the language itself. "You carry yourself like the last man in the universe."

Beran smiled wanly. "When today is over, for better or worse, I will sleep well."

"I envy no one!" mused Finisterle. "Least of all, you."

"And I, on the other hand, envy all but myself," replied Beran morosely. "I am truly the popular concept of a Panarch—the overman who carries power as a curse, delivers decisions as other men hurl iron javelins. . . . And yet I would not change—for I am sufficiently dominated by Breakness Institute to believe that no one but myself is capable of disinterested justice."

"This credence which you deprecate—it may be no more than fact."

A chime sounded in the distance, then another and another.

"Now approaches the issue," said Beran. "In the next hour Pao is ruined or Pao is saved." He went to the great black chair, seated himself and relaxed with quiet dignity.

Finisterle silently chose a seat down near the end of the table.

The Mamarone flung back the fretwork door; into the room came a slow file—a group of ministers, secretaries, miscellaneous functionaries: two dozen in all. They inclined their heads in respect, and soberly took their places around the table.

Serving maidens entered, poured chilled sparkling wine.

The chimes sounded. Once more the Mamarone opened the door. Marching smartly into the room came Esteban Carbone, Grand Marshall of the Valiants, with four subalterns. They wore their most splendid uniforms and helms of white metal which they doffed as they entered. They

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halted in a line before Beran, bowed, stood impassively.

Beran rose to his feet, returned a ceremonious greeting. The Valiants seated themselves with rehearsed precision.

"Time advances, conditions change," said Beran in an even voice, speaking in Valiant. "Dynamic programs once valuable become harmful exaggerations when the need has passed. Such is the present situation on Pao. We are in danger of losing our unity.

"I refer in part to the Valiant camp. It was created to counter a specific threat. The threat has been rebuffed, we are at peace. The Valiants, while retaining their identity, must now be reintegrated into the general population. That is our first great task.

"To this end, cantonments will be established among all the eight continents and the larger isles. To these cantonments the Valiants shall disperse, in units of fifty men and women. They shall use the cantonment as an organizational area and shall take up residence in the countryside, recruiting locally as becomes necessary. The areas now occupied by the Valiants will be restored to their previous use." He paused, stared from eye to eye.

Finisterle, observing, marvelled that the man he had known as a moody hesitant youth should show such a strong face of decision.

"Are there any questions or comments?" asked Beran, Panarch of Pao.

The Grand Marshal sat like a man of stone. At last he inclined his head. "Panarch, I hear your orders, but I find them incomprehensible. It is a basic fact that Pao requires a strong arm of offense and defense. We Valiants are that arm. We are indispensable. Your order will destroy us. We will be diluted and dispersed. We will lose our esprit, our unity, our competitivity."

"I realize all this," said Beran. "I regret it. But it is the lesser of the evils. The Valiants henceforth must serve as a cadre, and our military arm will once again be truly Paonese."

"Ah, Panarch," spoke the Grand Marshal abruptly, "this is the crux of the difficulty! You Paonese have no military interest, you—"

Beran held up his hand. "*We* Paonese," he said in a harsh voice. "All of us are Paonese."

The Grand Marshal bowed. "I spoke in haste. But, Panarch, surely it is clear that dispersion will lesson our efficiency! We must drill together, engage in exercises, ceremonies, competitions—"

Beran had anticipated the protest. "The problems you mention are real, but merely pose logistical and organizational challenges. I have no wish to diminish either the efficiency or the prestige of the Valiants; but the integrity of the

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state is at stake, and these tumor-like enclaves, benign though they be, must be removed."

Esteban Carbone stared glumly at the ground a moment, then glanced left and right at his aides for support. The faces of both were bleak and dispirited.

"A factor you ignore, Panarch, is that of morale," Carbone said heavily. "Our effectiveness—"

Beran interrupted briskly. "These are problems which you, as Grand Marshal, must solve. If you are incapable, I will appoint someone else. There will be no more discussion; the basic principle as I have outlined it must be accepted. You will confer with the Minister of Lands over details."

He rose to his feet, bowed in formal dismissal. The Valiants bowed, marched from the room, their faces grimly impassive.

As they left a second group entered, wearing the simple gray and white of the Technicants. They received, in general, the same orders as the Valiants, and put forward the same protests. "Why need the units be small? Surely there is scope on Pao for a number of industrial complexes. Remember that our efficiency depends on a concentration of skill. We cannot function in such small unite!"

"Your responsibility is more than the production of goods. You must educate and train your fellow Paonese. There will undoubtedly be a period of confusion, but eventually the new policy will work to our common benefit."

The Technicants departed as bitterly dissatisfied as the Valiants.

Later in the day Beran walked along the beach with Finisterle, who could be trusted to speak without calculation as to what Beran might prefer to hear. The quiet surf rolled up the sand, retreated into the sea among glistening bits of shell, fragments of bright blue coral, strands of purple kelp.

Finisterle was dispassionately blunt. "I think that you made a mistake in issuing your orders here on Pergolai. The Valiants and Technicants will return to familiar environments. The effect will be that of returning to reality, and in retrospect the instructions will seem fantastic. At Deirombona and at Cloeopter, the orders would have had more direct reference to their subject."

"You think I will be disobeyed?"

"The possibility appears strong."

Beran sighed. "I fear so myself. Disobedience may not be permitted." He shook his head angrily. "Now we must pay the price for Bustamonte's folly."

"And my sire, Lord Palafox's ambition," remarked Finisterle.

Beran said no more. They returned to the pavilion and Beran immediately summoned his Minister of Civil Order.

"Mobilize the Mamarone, the entire corps."

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The Minister stood stupidly. "Mobilize the Mamarone? Where?"

"At Eiljanre. Immediately."

BERAN, Finisterle and a small retinue flew down out of the cloudless Paonese sky to Deirombona. Behind them, still beyond the horizon, came six sky-barges, bearing the entire Mamarone corps, growling and mumbling to each other.

The air-car grounded. Beran and his party alighted, crossed the vacant plaza, passed under the Stele of Heroes, and entered the long low structure which Esteban Carbone used for his headquarters, as familiar to Beran as the Grand Palace at Eiljanre. Ignoring startled expressions and staccato questions, he walked to the staff room, slid back the door.

The Grand Marshal and four other officers looked up in an irritation which changed to guilty surprise.

Beran strode forward, impelled by an anger which over-rode his natural diffidence. On the table lay a schedule entitled: *Field Exercises 262: Maneuver of Type C Warships and Auxiliary Torpedo-Units.*

Beran fixed Esteban Carbone with a lambent glare. "Is this the manner in which you carry out my orders?"

Carbone, after his initial surprise, was not to be intimidated. He rose to his feet, towering over Beran, face pale and pinched with his own anger.

"I plead guilty, Panarch, to delay. I was certain that after consideration you would understand the mistake of your first command—"

"It is no mistake. Now—at this very moment—I order you: implement the instructions I gave you yesterday!"

The men stared eye to eye, each determined to pursue the course he deemed vital, neither intending to yield.

"You press us hard," said the Marshal in a glacial voice. "Many here at Deirombona feel that we who wield the power should enjoy the fruits of power—so unless you wish to risk—"

"Act!" cried Beran. He raised his hand. "Or I kill you now!"

Behind him there was sudden movement, a spatter of blue light, a hoarse cry, a clatter of metal. Wheeling, Beran saw Finisterle standing over the body of a Valiant officer. A hammer-gun lay on the floor; Finisterle held a smoking energy-needle.

Carbone struck out with his fist, hit Beran hard on the jaw. Beran toppled back upon the desk. Finisterle turned to shoot, but was forced to hold his fire for the confusion.

A voice cried, "To Eiljanre! Death to the Paonese tyrants!"

Beran rose to his feet, but the

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Marshal had departed. Nursing his sore jaw, he spoke into a shoulder microphone; the six sky-barges, now above Deirombona, swooped down to the square; the monstrous black Mamarone poured forth.

"Surround the corps headquarters," came Beran's orders. "Allow neither entrance nor exit."

Carbone had broadcast orders of his own; from nearby barracks came hasty sounds, and into the plaza poured groups of Valiant warriors. At sight of the neutraloids they stopped short. Mamarone in magenta and green stared at the young Valiants, and the air seemed to harden with hate along the line of sight.

Squad leaders sprang forward, the Valiants became a disciplined force instead of a mob. For a space there was silence, while Mamarone and Myrmidon weighed each other.

At the necks of the squad leaders vibrators pulsed. The voice of Grand Marshal Esteban Carbone issued from a filament. "Attack and destroy. Spare no one, kill all."

The battle was the most ferocious in the history of Pao. It was fought without words, without quarter. The Myrmidons outnumbered the Mamarone, but each neutraloid possessed three times the strength of an ordinary man.

At a signal the Myrmidons came running forward, weaving and dodging. The neutraloids opened fire with shatter-beams and killed several dozen Myrmidons. The Myrmidons, lying prone, returned the fire; the neutraloids, secure behind absorption shields, waited.

The Myrmidons advanced in enveloping waves, one segment forcing the neutraloids to shelter behind their shields, while the other advanced, and so they leap-frogged across the plaza, fifty feet at a time.

Within the headquarters Beran called into his microphone.

"Marshal, I beseech you, prevent spilling of blood. It is unnecessary, and good Paonese will die!"

There was no response. In the plaza only a hundred feet separated Mamarone from Myrmidon; they stood almost eye to eye, the neutraloids grinning in humorless rancor, contemptuous of life, unconscious of fear; the Myrmidons seething with impatience and verve, anxious for glory. The neutraloids, behind their screens and with backs against the wall of the corps headquarters, were secure from small weapons; however once they should move away from the wall, their backs would be vulnerable.

Suddenly they dropped the screens; their weapons poured death into the nearby ranks: a hundred men fell in an instant. The screens returned into place

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and they took the retaliating fire without casualty.

The gaps in the front line were filled instantly. Horns blew a brilliant fanfare; the Myrmidons drew scimitars and charged against the black giants.

The neutraloids dropped the screens, the weapons poured out death, a hundred, two hundred warriors were killed. But twenty or thirty sprang across the final few yards. The neutraloids drew their own great blades, hacked, hewed; there was the flash of steel, hisses, hoarse calls, and again the Mamarone stood free. But while the shields had been down, lances of fire from the rear ranks of the Myrmidons found targets, and a dozen neutraloids were fallen.

Stolidly the black ranks closed. Again the Myrmidon horns sounded, again the charge, and again the hack and splinter of steel. It was late afternoon; ragged clouds low in the west veiled the sun, but an occasional beam of orange light played across the battle, glowing on the splendid fabrics, reflecting from glistening black bodies, shining dark on spilled blood.

Within the staff headquarters Beran stood in bitter frustration. The stupidity, the arrogance of these men! They were destroying the Pao he had hoped to build—and he, lord of fifteen billion, could find insufficient strength to subdue a few thousand rebels.

In the plaza the Myrmidons at last split the neutraloid line into two, battered back the ends, bunched the giant warriors into two clots.

The neutraloids knew their time had come, and all their terrible detestation for life, for men, for the universe boiled up and condensed in a clot of pure fury. Swinging their great swords with one hand, grasping necks and heads with the other, they waded back and forth across the plaza, and the ground was littered with corpses and parts of corpses. One by one they succumbed, to a thousand hacks and cuts. Their number dwindled—to fifty, to thirty, to twenty, to ten, to five.

These last few looked at each other, and laughed, inhuman hoarse bellows, and presently they too died, and the plaza was quiet except for subdued sobbing. Then behind, by the Stele, the Valiant women set up a chant of victory, forlorn but exulting, and the survivors of the battle, gasping and sick, joined the paean.

Within the building Beran and his small company had already departed, flying back to Eiljanre in the air-boat. Beran sat steeped in misery. His body shook, his eyes burnt in their sockets, his stomach felt as if it were caked with lye. Failure, the breaking of his dreams, the beginning of chaos! All to the score of Palafox!

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He thought of the tall spare form, the lean face with the wedge-shaped nose and opaque black eyes. The image carried such intensity of emotion to become almost dear to him, something to be cherished from all harm, except that destruction which he himself would deal. In the event, of course, that he himself should survive. Because now hostility had erupted into bloodshed, and it was inconceivable that the Myrmidons should not go on the offensive. With what weapons could he subdue them? He had no army, no air-force, no space-navy, not even the Mamarone. He had his own two hands, no more.

Unless—he laughed aloud—unless he could enlist the aid of Palafox.

Was this possible? No, said Beran, contemplating the price Palafox would demand for his aid. Then this was the end; he must flee to a far continent and hope to lose himself among the billions residing there.

With the last rays of sunset flickering over the roofs of Eiljanre, he arrived at the Palace.

In the great hall sat Palafox, in his usual gray and brown, a wry sad smile on his mouth, a peculiar shine to his eyes.

Elsewhere in the hall sat Cogitants, Palafox's sons for the most part. They were subdued, grave, respectful. As Beran came into the room, the Cogitants averted their eyes.

Beran ignored them. Slowly he approached Palafox, until they stood only ten feet apart.

Palafox's expression changed no whit; the sad smile trembled on his mouth; the dangerous shine glittered in his eyes.

It was clear to Beran that Palafox had completely succumbed to the Breakness syndrome. Palafox was an Emeritus.

XVI

PALAFOX saluted Beran with a gesture of apparent affability; but there was no corresponding change in his expression. "My wayward young disciple! I understand that you have undergone serious reverses."

Beran came forward another step or two. He need only raise his hand, point, expunge this crafty megalomaniac. As he marshaled himself to act, Palafox uttered a soft word, and Beran found himself seized by four men strange to him, wearing garments of Breakness. While the Cogitants looked on soberly these men flung Beran flat on his face, opened his clothes, touched metal to his skin. There was an instant of piercing pain, then numbness along his back. He heard the click of tools, felt the quiver of manipulation, a wrench or two, and then they were done with him.

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Pale, shaken, humiliated, he regained his feet, rearranged his garments.

Palafox said easily, "You are careless with the weapon provided you; now it is removed and we can talk with greater relaxation."

Beran could find no answer. Growling deep in his throat, he marched forward, stood before Palafox. He opened his mouth to speak, but the only words which came to mind were such paltry vehicles for his hate that he stood in silence.

Palafox smiled slightly. "Once again Pao is in trouble; once again it is Lord Palafox of Breakness to whom appeals are made.

"I made no appeals," said Beran in a husky voice.

Palafox ignored him. "Ayudor Bustamonte once needed me. I aided him, and Pao became a world of power and triumph. But he who profited, Panarch Beran Panasper, broke the contract. Now, again the Paonese government faces destruction. And only Palafox can save you."

Realizing that exhibitions of rage merely amused Palafox, Beran forced himself to speak in a voice of moderation.

"Your price, I assume, is as before? Unlimited scope for your satyriasis?"

Palafox grinned openly. "You express it crudely but adequately. I prefer the word 'fecundity'. But such is my price."

A Cogitant came into the room, approached Palafox, spoke a word or two in Breakness. Palafox looked to Beran. "The Myrmidons are coming. They boast that they will burn Eiljanre, destroy Beran and set forth to conquer the universe. This, they claim, is their destiny."

"How will you deal with the Myrmidons?" asked Beran tartly.

"Easily," said Palafox. "I control them because they fear me. I am the most highly modified man on Breakness, the most powerful man ever to exist. If Esteban Carbone fails to obey me. I will kill him. To their plans for conquest I am indifferent. Let them destroy this city, let them destroy all the cities, as many as they will."

Palafox's voice was rising; he was becoming excited. "So much the easier for me, for my seed! This is my world, this is where I shall live magnified by a million sons. I shall fructify a world; there never shall have been so vast a siring! In fifty years the planet will know no name other than Palafox, you shall see my face on every face. The world will be I, I will be the world!"

The black eyes glowed like opals, pulsing with fire. Beran became infected with the madness; the room was unreal, hot gases swirled through his mind. Palafox, losing the appearance of a man, took on various semblances in rapid succession: a tall eel, a

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phallus, a charred post with knot-holes for eyes, a black nothingness.

"A demon!" gasped Beran. "The Evil Demon!" He lunged forward, caught Palafox's arm, hurled Palafox stumbling to the floor.

Palafox struck with a thud, a cry of pain. He sprang to his feet holding his arm—the same arm that Beran had wounded before—and he looked an Evil Demon indeed.

"Now is your end, gad-fly!" He raised his hand, pointed his finger. From the Cogitants came a mutter.

The finger remained pointed. No fire leapt forth. Palafox's face twisted in passion. He felt his arm, inspected his finger. He looked up, calm once more, signaled to his sons.

"Kill this man, here and now," he cried. "No longer shall he breathe the air of my planet."

There was dead silence. No one moved. Palafox stared incredulously; Beran looked numbly about him. Everywhere in the room faces turned away, looking neither toward Beran nor Palafox.

Beran suddenly found his voice. He cried out hoarsely, "You talk madness!" He turned to the Cogitants. Palafox had spoken in Breakness, Beran spoke in Pastiche.

"You Cogitants! Choose the world you would live in! Shall it be the Pao you know now, or the world this Emeritus proposes?"

The epithet stung Palafox; he jerked in anger, and in Breakness, the language of insulated intelligence, he barked, "Kill this man!"

In Pastiche, language of the Interpreters, a tongue used by men dedicated to human service, Beran called, "No! Kill this senile megalomaniac instead!"

Palafox motioned furiously to the four men of Breakness—those who had de-energized Beran's circuits. His voice was deep and resonant. "I, Palafox, the Great Sire, order you, kill this man!"

The four came forward.

The Cogitants stood like statues. Then they moved as if at a single decision. From twenty parts of the room streaks of flame leapt forth. Transfixed from twenty directions, eyes bulging, hair fluffing into a nimbus from the sudden charge, Lord Palafox of Breakness died.

Beran fell into a chair, unable to stand. Presently he took a deep breath, staggered to his feet. "I can say nothing to you now—only that I shall try to build the sort of world that Cogitants as well as Paonese can live in with satisfaction."

Finisterle, standing somberly to the side, said, "I fear that this option, admirable as it is, lies not entirely in your hands."

Beran followed his gaze, through the tall windows. High up in the sky appeared bursts of

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colored fire, spreading and sparkling, as if in celebration for some glory.

"The Myrmidons," said Finisterle. "They come for vengeance."

"I had not expected them," muttered Beran.

The sky was filled with explosions of colored sparks in flower-like garlands, three-dimensional snowflakes, heraldic medallions. A dozen great black warships cruised over Eiljanre, circled over the palace, in tighter and tighter circles, funnelling down toward the landing deck.

Finisterle touched Beran's arm. "Best had you flee while there is yet time. They will show you no mercy."

Beran made no answer.

Finisterle took his arm. "You accomplish nothing here but your own death. There is no guard to protect you, we are all at their mercy."

Beran gently disengaged himself. "I shall remain here, I shall not flee."

"They will kill you!"

Beran gave the peculiar Paonese shrug of fatalism. "All men die."

"But you have much to do, and you can do nothing dead! Leave the city, and presently the Myrmidons will tire of the novelty and return to their games."

"No," said Beran. "Bustamonte fled. The Brumbos pursued him, ran him to the ground. I will no longer flee anyone. I will wait here with my dignity, and if they kill me, so shall it be."

An hour passed; the minutes ticking off slowly, one by one. The warships dropped low, hovered only yards from the ground. The flagship settled gingerly upon the palace deck.

Within the great hall Beran sat quietly on the dynastic Black Chair, his face drawn with fatigue, his eyes wide and dark. The Cogitants stood in muttering groups, watching Beran from the corners of their eyes.

From far off came a whisper of sound, a deep chant, growing louder, a chant of dedication, of victory, sung to the organic rhythm of pumping heart, of marching feet.

Louder and louder—the sound of a hundred voices, and now the tread of heavy steps could likewise be heard.

The chant swelled, the door burst open: into the great hall marched Esteban Carbone, the Grand Marshal. Behind him came a dozen young Field Marshals, and behind these, ranks of staff officers.

Esteban Carbone strode up to the Black Chair and faced Beran.

"Beran," spoke Esteban Carbone, "you have done us unforgivable injury; you have proved a false Panarch, unfit to govern the planet Pao. Therefore we have come in force to pull you down

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from the Black Chair and to take you away to your death."

Beran nodded thoughtfully, as if Esteban Carbone had come urging a petition.

"To those who wield the power shall go the direction of the state: this is the basic axiom of history. You are powerless, only we Myrmidons are strong. Hence we shall rule, and I now declare that Grand Marshal of the Myrmidons shall now and forever function as Panarch of Pao."

Beran said no word; indeed, there was no word to be said.

"Therefore, Beran, arise in what little dignity you retain, leave the Black Chair and walk forth to your death."

From the Cogitants came an interruption. Finisterle spoke out angrily. "One moment; you go too far and too fast."

Esteban Carbone swung about. "What is this you say?"

"Your thesis is correct: that he who wields power shall rule—but I challenge that you wield power on Pao."

Esteban Carbone laughed. "Is there anyone who can deter us in any course we care to pursue?"

"That is not altogether the point. No man can rule Pao without consent of the Paonese. You do not have that consent."

Esteban Carbone made a careless gesture. "No matter. We shall not interfere with the Paonese; they can govern themselves—so long as they supply us our needs."

"And you believe that the Technicants will continue to supply you with tools and weapons?"

"Why should they not? They care little who buys their goods."

"And who shall make your needs known to them? Who will give orders to the Paonese?"

"We shall, naturally."

"But how will they understand you? You speak neither Technicant nor Paonese, they speak no Valiant. We Cogitants refuse to serve you."

Esteban Carbone laughed. "This is an interesting proposition. Are you suggesting that Cogitants, by reason of their linguistic knack, should therefore rule the Valiants?"

"No. I point out that you are unable to rule the planet Pao, that you cannot communicate with those you claim to be your subjects."

Esteban Carbone shrugged. "This is no great matter. We speak a few words of Pastiche, enough to make ourselves understood; soon we will speak better, and so shall we train our children."

Beran spoke for the first time. "I offer a suggestion which perhaps will satisfy the ambitions of everyone. Let us agree that the Valiants are able to kill as many Paonese as they desire, all those who actively oppose them, and so

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may be said to exercise authority. However, they will find themselves embarrassed: first, by the traditional resistance of the Paonese to coercion, and secondly, by inability to communicate either with the Paonese or the Technicants."

Carbone listened with a grim face. "Time will cure these embarrassments. We are the conquerors, remember; we will rule as we see fit!"

"Agreed," said Beran in a tired voice. "You are the conquerors. But you will rule best by disturbing the least. And until all Pao shares a single language, such as Pastiche, you cannot rule without great disturbance."

"Then all Pao must speak one language!" cried Carbone. "That is a simple enough remedy! What is the language but a set of words? This is my first command: every man, woman and child on the planet must learn Pastiche."

"And in the meantime?" inquired Finisterle.

Esteban Carbone chewed his lip. "Things must proceed more or less as usual." He eyed Beran. "Do you, then, acknowledge my power?"

Beran laughed. "Freely. In accordance with your wish, I hereby order that every child of Pao: Valiant, Technicant, Cogitant and Paonese, must learn Pastiche, even in precedence to the language of his father."

Estaban Carbone stared at him searchingly, and said at last, "You have come off better than you deserve, Beran. It is true that we Valiants do not care to trouble with the details of governing, and this is your one bargaining point, your single usefulness. So long as you are obedient and useful, so long may you sit in the Black Chair and call yourself Panarch. But remember every instant of day and night that Valiants wield the real authority of Pao, and that we will enforce it without mercy!" He bowed, turned on his heel, marched from the hall.

The Field Marshals swung smartly after him, and next the officers. The chant began, the rhythm pounding to the beat of steps on marble; it dwindled in volume and presently was heard no more. Shortly the black warships lifted from Eiljanre climbed into the sky amid triumphant showers of colored fire, and sailed southwest to Deirombona.

Beran sat slumped in the Black Chair. His face was white and haggard, but his expression was calm.

"I have compromised, I have been humiliated," he said to Finisterle, "but in one day I have achieved the totality of my ambitions. Palafox is dead, and we are embarked on the great task of my life—the unifying of Pao."

Finisterle handed Beran a cup of mulled wine, drank deep from

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a cup of his own. "Those strutting cockerels! At this moment they parade around their Stele, beating their chests, and at any instant—he pointed his finger at a bowl of fruit. Blue flame lanced forth, the bowl shattered.

"It is better that we allowed them their triumph," said Beran. "Basically, they are decent people, if naive, and they will cooperate much more readily as masters than as subjects. And in twenty years . . ."

He rose to his feet; he and Finisterle walked across the hall, looked out over the roofs of Eiljanre. "Pastiche—composite of Breakness, Technicant, Valiant, Paonese. Pastiche—the language of dedicated responsibility to mankind as a whole. In twenty years, everyone will speak Pastiche. It will fertilize the old minds, shape the new minds. What kind of world will Pao be then?"

They looked out into the night, across the lights of Eiljanre, and wondered.

NEXT ISSUE'S COMPLETE NOVEL

MISSION TO A DISTANT STAR

by FRANK BELKNAP LONG

The aliens did not come to Earth as ruthless conquerors. Stealthily and insidiously they made their dominance felt, and that dominance was also a challenge—to Man, the everlasting star seeker. A new-horizon type science fiction novel, by a truly brilliant writer.

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SOLE SURVIVOR

She was alone in a world too strange and terrible for a child to understand.

by BASIL WELLS

9:50 A.M.

The highways flowed northward, bumper to bumper, in one-way flight. Buses crowded with school children, and open trucks crammed with gray-faced adults, paced the mass evacuation . . .

Shortly after Wednesday morning school sessions were abandoned the cities cupping Wareton on the map had ceased to exist as units. Buffalo and Cleveland and Pittsburgh—especially Pittsburgh—lifted expanding, fiery fingers of death skyward. Shortly afterward the path of nuclear fallout became clear and all villages and smaller cities were warned. Headquarters had agreed that the Allegheny National Forest offered a haven.

11:45 A.M.

Erin Ward wriggled her slim nine-year-old body from its cramped nest behind the stacked dustiness of discarded desks and tables. She sneezed, the shadowy emptiness of the cavernous school basement echoing back the sound. She shivered. The unnatural silence was terrifying. She ran up the wide wooden steps to the ground floor and daylight.

Here the slow eddies of dust stirred by the frenzied feet of students and teachers alike were already settling. A hazy sunlight flooded through the winter-grimed windows highlighting the drifting motes. Books lay strewn about and little puddles of abandoned pencils, tablets, and treasured

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desk debris dotted the long wooden-floored hall.

The buses were long gone—Erin had heard the last motor fade, roaring, into silence almost fifteen minutes before. Now she could leave the school and walk two blocks to the railroad, cross it, and in three blocks more be home. Let the rest of them go. She had seen the Allegheny Forest and the river. Besides, they wouldn't let her tell her mother she was going and she might worry.

Of course her mother and father were in Cleveland, shopping, this being Wednesday and the barbershop closed all day. But Jeff or Kyra might have come home by now, what with all the schools closed for the day, and she could always go to Gramp and Gramm Ward's.

The big double doors were closed but not locked, and she had no difficulty opening them. A moment later she was skipping down the long winding walk to the street, her clothes blowing in the wind.

Wareton was strangely different. Even Erin's nine-year-old mind could sense it. She saw two cars, one of them on its side in the middle of the street, and both shattered and bent, but there was no crowd. Presently she saw other cars, empty, and parked at intervals along the curb, and the half-open doors of houses trailing strings of clothing and abandoned furniture out to the street.

Erin slowed her pace until she was walking, a great wonder and fear growing as she came to the railroad and crossed it. She had seen no life save two stray dogs that shied away from her, snarling.

12:30 P.M.

The pattern of the fallout was shifting. It curved, as the wind changed, the Buffalo fallout bearing northward along with that of Cleveland and Detroit. But now the Pittsburgh clouds came bumbling northward. Added to this were the secondary targets of Youngstown and Little Washington. These were now adding their fresh death to the seven expanded mushrooms slowly dissolving earthward.

On the charts along the Eastern seaboard it was patent that Wareton and its area had narrowly escaped one pattern of fallout only to be engulfed by another.

12:55 P.M.

Erin Ward was crying, the tears streaking the dust from the basement and twisted into whorls by her grimy little fists. She was heading westward out of Wareton along the highway, her goal the farm home of Aunt Ellen Belknap, nine miles distant.

Jeff and Kyra were not home, nor had her grandfather and

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grandmother been about. Back home she had turned on the radio and heard again and again the warning to clear out of Western Pennsylvania. Only, now, south-central Ohio was to be their goal.

Erin's Aunt Ellen lived in Ohio. Many times the preceding summer Fred and Celia Ward, her father and mother, had driven out to the farm on Sunday afternoons. It was only a few minutes drive and she knew the way. So now she headed westward.

Just ahead was the blacktop road that twisted up over the hills toward the farm and Ohio.

2:05 P.M.

The cloud's low-groping fingers came up through the valley from the south and probed through the houses and business places of Wareton. It smothered the small barbershop of Fred Ward and flooded through the restaurant where Celia Ward and her sister, Myra, worked. Several score dogs and as many other household pets breathed in the lethal cloud and, all unknowing, were marked for death.

The cloud moved northward and now westward as the valley shifted. It pushed along the blacktop road and lapped over the low hill halfway up the valley's wall.

Fifty feet from its final crest a tiny, dark-haired girl in a red-and-white dotted dress clutched a half-empty box of rounded, brownish-yellow crackers more firmly to her breast and sat resting her weary feet beside the highway.

3:40 P.M.

She heard the car snoring through the unnatural stillnesses of the countryside, and quickly hid in a clump of roadside brush.

The pickup truck was red. Behind the two men in the front seat a third man was busily engaged in checking the apparatus in the truck's box. Their faces were grim and they wore shapeless, windowed coverings of plastic. To Erin's eyes they must have seemed alien enemies rather than the radiation experts they actually were.

The truck rolled slowly eastward and after it was out of sight Erin took up her seemingly endless trek in the opposite direction.

5:35 P.M.

With the slacking of the wind the death cloud expanded and sent out new pseudopods. One of these fingers crept up through a wooded ravine and wrapped itself around a halted pickup truck only to be thwarted by a clicking mechanism and the protective suits. The truck raced away, southward, into clear territory, once again.

Once again the cloud moved westward, but not so fast as the limping dusty figure in the red-

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and-white dotted dress. The blacktop road behind her, the small girl walked along a graveled road that stretched out smoothly across the last two miles that separated her from her goal.

8:05 P.M.

Erin came up over the low grassy bank of the roadside ditch to the long lawn's clipped softness. Twilight was not far away, and she felt a sudden emptiness as she realized that the Belknap car was gone from the garage. But she could wait until Aunt Ellen came back. Even if the front door was locked she knew about the concealed iron bar that was grooved into the cellar entrance.

The front door *was* locked. She hoisted the heavy cellar door, almost as heavy as her own body, and went down the cement steps into the cellar proper.

Erin hurried through the semi-darkness to the kitchen steps and up into the kitchen. There were no lights, the power was off, but she knew where her Aunt Ellen's flashlights were kept.

After she had washed her face and hands and eaten she lay down on the couch in the living room and went to sleep, feeling confident that Aunt Ellen would soon return.

10:00 P.M.

With the strengthening of the south wind the area of contamination spread northward. The areas already "hot" were blocked off and awaited the decontamination squads. The residents whose homes were untouched were allowed to return to them, and with them they brought as many guests as they could accommodate. The valley where Wareton lay was off limits and a solid area of contamination barred the Ohio border from the evacuees. And now, from the East, new clouds closed the trap.

Along the gravel road that was the only clean path into a large island of uncontaminated farmland drove the three cars bound for the Belknap farm. Ellen Belknap whispered a "Thank You God" as they drove into the yard.

10:10 P.M.

"It's Erin!" She heard someone cry out, and someone was holding her too tightly.

She came awake and looked solemnly around at the strange faces. In the flickering yellow gleam of the kerosene lamps that the Belknaps had lighted she recognized no one. Not at first. And then she saw that Aunt Ellen held her, and Uncle Keith was there.

"Aren't Mother and Daddy with you?" she asked.

She saw Uncle Keith look at her aunt and turn his head.

"Maybe tomorrow," Aunt Ellen said softly. "Now it's time for bed.

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FOREVER STENN

All Stenn really wanted was to be left alone, free to plow his own field under the stars. Why did the strangers keep tormenting him?

by ALGIS BUDRYS

STENN hunched his shoulders and lifted the plow. With his back against the split-rail fence that marked the end of his field, he swung it around, dropped it, and wiped the back of his heavy wrist across his forehead. Squinting into the sun, he twitched the reins and began following his bony horse back across the cramped field.

As he walked, his bare feet set themselves doggedly in the turned earth. He had walked over every fist of dirt in this hectare, so many times that the earth was like cream. Every stone, every root, had been found and thrown aside long ago. He kept his head down and his eyes on the furrow. He could trust the horse to walk straight. Horses were dependable, though they died too often.

He heard an automobile stop on the crushed-stone road beside his field, and growled to himself. Automobiles meant somebody from oustide the village.

"You, there!" a harsh voice called out. "Come here."

He growled to himself again and went on as though he hadn't heard. Sometimes that was good enough. The stranger, whoever he was and whatever he wanted, might simply curse him and then go away.

The automobile door slammed. "You—I said come here!"

Stenn yanked the reins, stopped the horse, wound the reins deliberately, in no hurry, wrapped them around the plow handles, and finally turned around. Scowling out from under his lowered eyebrows, he looked at the man standing impatiently on the other side of the fence.

He was wearing a uniform and

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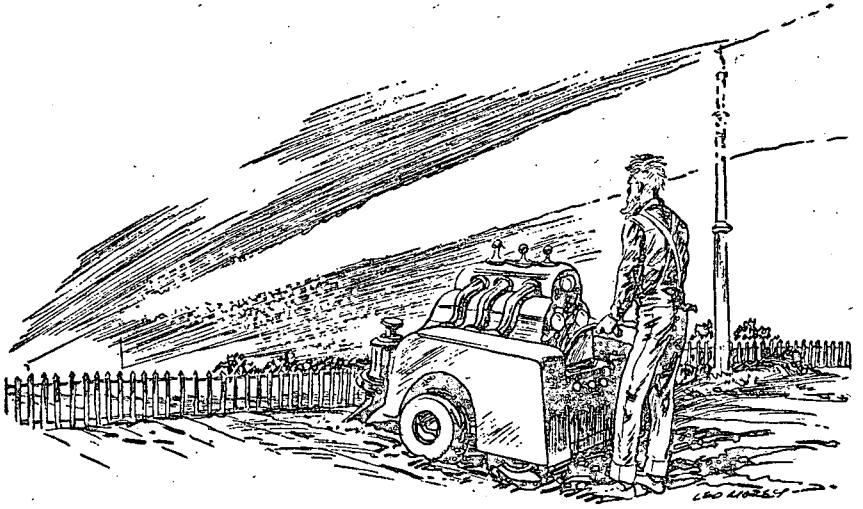

boots, with a pistol in a holster at his waist. Stenn shuffled forward, taking off his hat in the way he'd learned from his father, long ago in other times when strangers in uniforms spoke to him. He reached the fence and stopped.

"Didn't you hear me?" the man demanded. His face was set in the hard, angry mask that Stenn expected of such men. Expecting it, he ignored it and grunted to show he was here now.

"What's your name?" the man barked.

Stenn gave it, and the man nodded. "All right. You're coming with me to see the Commissioner."

Stenn hunched his shoulders. Here was half a day wasted.

"Now!" the man rasped.

Stenn kept his face set, looking at the man woodenly. The man was powerful, with his uniform and his Commissioner behind him, so there was no question of not going. The half day was wasted, and that was that.

"I'll stall my horse," he grunted.

The man grinned. "The devil with your horse. You won't have to worry about him where you're going. Get in the car!"

Still expressionless, Stenn bent through the fence and shuffled to the automobile. There was only one seat. The uniformed man took a set of handcuffs out of his pocket, pulled Stenn's right wrist across his body, and manacled it to the left-hand assist handle on the dashboard. Then the uniformed man started the automobile, turned it around, and drove them back the way he had come.

Stenn twisted his head to look back at the horse standing in the middle of the field. Then he faced

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front, his arm hanging by its wristlet, and said nothing all the way into the town on the far side of the village. He had never been in an automobile before. He didn't like riding in one.

In the Commissioner's office, he sat stiffly in the hard chair facing the light, his knotty fingers curled over his knees.

"What is your name?" the Commissioner asked.

Stenn gave it again, and the Commissioner grunted. "That's the name on your papers here. Now, what's your real name? Who sent you here?"

Stenn gave his name again. He didn't understand the second part of the question, so he didn't say anything beyond that.

"Who forged these records?" the Commissioner asked. "What is your assignment—sabotage?"

Stenn looked at him woodenly. He made no sense out of what the Commissioner was saying. This was often true of questions strangers asked. It did not upset him.

"Come, now," the Commissioner said softly, "these records are a ridiculous forgery. Did your masters think that even the former regime here could make such mistakes in its birth archives?"

Stenn had no answer for him.

The Commissioner's voice remained smooth. "Let's be sensible. Your masters obviously couldn't have cared much about your safety if they permitted themselves to be so clumsy. All I want you to tell me is when you were sent into this country, and who sent you. If you cooperate, nothing more will be made of the matter. It is even possible that the new regime might have a good offer for you. Now, despite your present appearance, you must be an intelligent man. I'm sure we can reach an agreement."

Stenn's expression remained the same. He stared uncomprehendingly and said nothing. Not one word of what the Commissioner had said was in any way understandable. He knew from experience that eventually all strangers grew tired of talking to him, and that sooner or later he would be able to go back to his farm.

"Listen, my friend, you'd better say something fairly soon," the Commissioner said.

Stenn shrugged.

The Commissioner called in another man, who was carrying a truncheon. The new man took a position beside Stenn and waited.

"Now," the Commissioner said, "What is your name?"

Stenn told him again. The Commissioner nodded to the new man, and Stenn was hit across the top of his left shoulder.

"How long have you lived in the village?"

Stenn told him, and the man with the truncheon hit him in the same place.

"Who are your associates?"

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"I keep to myself. I live alone." He was hit on the left shoulder again. The Commissioner was growing furious because Stenn showed no reaction.

"Where do you come from?"

"I was born in the village."

He was hit.

"Who were your parents?"

He gave his mother's and father's names, and was hit.

"Where are they?"

"Dead." He volunteered his first piece of information, since the Commissioner was now asking something he understood. "I have no brothers or sisters."

Instead of hitting him, the man with the truncheon felt his shoulder.

"Pardon, Commissioner, but there is something here I don't understand. This man's collarbone should be broken. It is not."

"To hell with his collarbone! If you don't know your business, learn it! Now, you—again. When were you born?"

Stenn told him, and was hit harder.

Finally, the Commissioner said: "Very well. We're going to put you on a train."

He pulled a blank record card out of his desk and in a taut, savage hand scrawled a few sentences on it in his own language. "By the time you come back, my friend—" He looked at Stenn, who returned his stare woodenly, just as expressionless now as he had been before he'd worn the stranger down. "By the time you come back, you will be as old again as these ridiculous papers make you out to be."

Stenn spent some years in the labor camp, keeping to himself, and shuffling wordlessly down into the shaft each day. He had noted that men here died even faster than his plowhorses did, but this did not concern him except that sometimes he was asked more questions to which he did not have answers. After a time, the men in charge of the camp had been replaced by crippled men in worn uniforms, and these men also shared his habit of silence, toward him and among themselves.

From time to time he looked up at the airplanes crossing overhead, especially when the camp siren gave the alarm, as it did more and more often. Finally, a day came when the few men remaining in charge of the camp locked themselves in a blockhouse and stayed there. Soon afterward, the other men who worked in the camp got the gates open. One or two of them ventured outside the gate. When the men in the blockhouse showed no reaction, everyone in the camp went wild. Some spilled out onto the snowy plains, and others broke into the blockhouse. Stenn shuffled down the railroad track alone, going back the way he'd come.

In due time, he arrived back at

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his farm. The house was burned down, and the fence broken. Also, there was a new regime, but very few of these new strangers as yet were able to talk his language, and, in any case, they found a great deal of work to do. Stenn went down to the woods with an ax he'd found, cut down some trees, built new fences, and then a new house. The new regime gave him a plow and a horse. He was satisfied.

STENN hunched his shoulders and lifted the plow. He put his back against his fence, swung the plow, and twitched the reins. His horse settled into the collar and began to move. It was a very old horse, and it plodded slowly. Stenn growled at it as his bare feet followed the furrow.

He came to the end of the field, pushing the plow stubbornly forward as the horse turned away from the fence. He had seen other men plow, wasting ground at each end of the field because they followed the horse as it turned. He did not, and he knew how much ground he'd gained, an extra half-meter a year for the whole width of the field. If one only considered the time since he'd gotten this old plow, which was now almost worn out, it was still a great gain.

He lifted the plow and turned it around, lifting his head to wipe his face, but not bothering to look past the borders of his field at the buildings that surrounded it. The buildings were no concern of his, since they were low enough on the south side so the sun could fall on his crops.

As he started forward again, he saw someone standing at the other end of the field, watching him. He growled and walked doggedly forward, his head down.

But the stranger had not gone away by the time he reached the opposite fence. Stenn ignored him and lifted the plow.

"May I talk to you a moment?" At least, that was what Stenn thought it must be the man had said. He spoke peculiarly, pronouncing his words in a different way from Stenn, and he spoke too fast. Stenn grunted and twitched the horse's reins.

The man persisted. "I'll come back later, if you're too busy now."

Stenn stopped the horse and hunched his shoulders. Better to get this over now, in that case. He wrapped the reins and turned around with a grunt.

The man was dressed in soft clothing, and though it was still early Spring and Stenn was wearing a coat, the man only wore that one garment, and a belt with little boxes attached to it.

"I was wondering if you needed anything," the man said. "New clothes, perhaps? You've had those a long time, haven't you?"

Steen looked at the man. These

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people had bothered him earlier, when they wanted to buy this land and build buildings on it. He remembered they'd been quick to offer, before they went away and left him alone. For that reason, he distrusted them.

"What do you have to trade?" the man asked.

Stenn grunted. Now, that was better. He looked at the man narrowly. "I have cabbages. I have potatoes. I will have sugar beets."

The man nodded. "What do you need?"

"I need a new horse. And a plow."

"Anything else?"

Stenn shook his head.

The man looked thoughtful. "Well, we can give you a new plow. We can give you one that doesn't need a horse."

"I don't want a tractor." Stenn scowled at the man. The regime that had given him this plow had first tried to explain a tractor to him.

The man, who looked shrewd enough so Stenn could respect him, shook his head. "I don't mean a tractor. I mean a plow that moves by itself. It is very much like your plow. You only have to push and pull on the handles to work it, and that's all. I'm afraid that's the best I can do. There aren't very many horses at all, any more."

"I'll look at it," Stenn grunted. He wasn't surprised. Horses died too often. Furthermore, they ate and had to be cared for.

"All right," the man said. "I'll bring it over later."

"What do you want for it?"

"Potatoes and cabbages, I suppose," the man said. "Twenty bushels of each."

"Ten."

"Eighteen."

Stenn spat in a furrow and turned away.

"All right, fifteen," the man said.

"Eleven," Stenn said grudgingly.

The man seemed to consider for a moment. "All right," he said.

Stenn grunted to himself. The man was no bargainer, that was certain. "Remember," he said, "it's no bargain if I don't like the plow."

The man nodded. "I'll be over with it tonight." He started to turn away, and then he stopped. "Tell me—what do you eat? Do you eat your potatoes and cabbages and beets?"

"That and my pigs. What else would a man eat?"

"Well, *why* do you eat?"

Stenn looked at the man. Why did he eat? Why did any man eat? He turned away and unwrapped the horse's reins. Giving the reins a twitch, he started the new furrow. He ate because everybody ate. Hadn't his father eaten before him? It was true a man didn't have to, as he'd found out for

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himself. If food was short he could go without eating. But usually, a man ate. What else were his teeth for?

"I'll see you tonight," the man reminded him, turning to depart.

Stenn ignored him. The man was a fool, as he'd suspected at first. If he brought the plow, well and good. If he didn't, earth could always be spaded.

The man brought the plow. Stenn examined it carefully, and tried it out. There wasn't much to using it—a twist of the handle to the right, a twist to the left, a push for forward and a pull for backing up. The motor was inside the share, and didn't need gasoline. Also, it was obviously hand-made, and that made the man an even greater fool for bargaining so poorly on such an expensive thing. Then, in addition, the man threw in some clothes—good, honest clothes—and these were also hand-woven. For his throw-in, the man asked for the horse, and Stenn nodded contemptuously. Now the fool was taking that useless mouth off his hands, and doubtless thinking he'd made a great gain.

The man left, and Stenn's mouth twisted into a grin. Now he had something better than a horse, and furthermore with this plow he could turn a furrow right up to the fences.

The long succession of days that followed were no different from those that had gone before. Sometimes he was left alone, and sometimes he was not. Sometimes there were good regimes. Sometimes not. Several times, he was taken away from his farm, and there were certain times he spent in hospitals. There was also a time he lived in a cage. But he always wore the strangers down in the end.

STENN stopped his plow at the bottom of the fence surrounding his field. It wasn't his old farm, but it was his farm, and the earth would grow crops. He glared up at the dim sun, its light cut into two halfs by the metal structure that sank its one pier into the lawn beyond his fence and then shot up at an angle, thickening out into a joint at a point some kilometers over his head and then fusing into one slender finger that disappeared over the horizon without touching ground.

As he looked up, he saw four of the silent firescythes go across the sky, trailing silver dust that vanished as they left it behind. They touched the four curving masts that rose out of the east and instantly shot back again, the way they had come. In a few minutes, the clear chime from the masts came to him across the distance.

In the shrubbery a few meters beyond his field, a bird answered the chime. Stenn turned his plough and touched the handles. As he

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walked forward, he thought that probably now he would have quiet times all summer. It had been quiet for several years, and he was beginning to think that such quietness was now a permanent thing. For many years before that, quiet times and loud times had alternated unpredictably, and, though it made no difference to the crops, it had annoyed him not to know whether to put the plugs in his ears or not.

Still, it wasn't so bad, even in loud times. The new regime left him entirely alone, though he could tell they disliked him. None of them had come near here in a long time, though he knew they had put a great deal of patience into planting the shrubs just so and tending the lawn. The gardener firescythes did that work now—machines, like his plow. He saw *them* often enough, darting back and forth over the lawn and parks that surrounded his field as far as he could see.

He looked up and growled as one of the cloudleaves passed its shadow across the field. They moved with the wind, rising and falling, glowing softly with all sorts of colors, and they never stayed still over his field long enough to hurt the crops. But still they angered him.

Then he saw one of the new regime come into being at the edge of his field. He stopped his plow and stood looking at it, his jaw pushed very sharply forward.

It swayed slightly in the breeze, and began talking to him. As always, it had great difficulty speaking so a man could understand it.

"Listen—listen . . ." Its voice, as the new regime's voices had always lately been, was bitter and angry. "Listen—day—*your* day has finally come . . ."

Stenn grunted and looked at it.

"We knew—knew there was no —help for it. Had to come. We fought it—but had to come. I am here to tell you . . . We knew one—one of us someday must . . . But why did it have to be me? Listen—I am the last human being alive on Earth. There are no more . . . not *you*—certainly not you."

It bent in a ripple of agony. "I am killing the machines." It swam its head around at the horizons. "I am over. All this work—all this beauty—all our life, everything in this world I am leaving—*yours!*" It spat the word out, curling in contempt.

Stenn watched it go out of being. He grunted, started the plow, and moved forward.

At dusk, he looked back along the way he had come. One single dark furrow stretched through the shrubs and the old fence through which he had driven the plow. He would have liked to turn around and put another furrow beside it, but he hadn't yet come to the end of his field.

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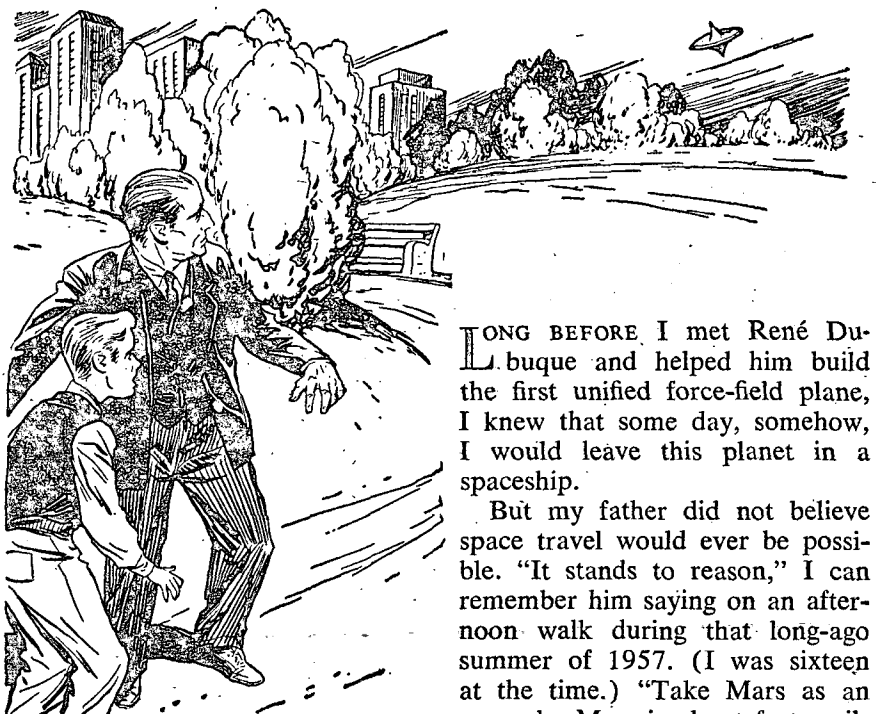
An Exciting Time Paradox Story by

HELEN McCLOY

The Unexpected



Travel in a time-space force-field—and youth's folly can rebound in a terrifying way.

LONG BEFORE I met René Dubuque and helped him build the first unified force-field plane, I knew that some day, somehow, I would leave this planet in a spaceship.

But my father did not believe space travel would ever be possible. "It stands to reason," I can remember him saying on an afternoon walk during that long-ago summer of 1957. (I was sixteen at the time.) "Take Mars as an example. Mars is about forty million miles away when it's closest to Earth. Even in our fastest experimental rocket planes a journey to Mars would take nearly two years. And no such plane travels fast enough to escape from

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the gravity pull of Earth. As for the stars *outside* our solar system, you'd have to move at the speed of light to travel such immense distances. Even then a journey to Alpha Centauri would take a lifetime. Nobody's going to start a colony in a space-ship solely to enable his descendants to land on some remote world in eternal cold and darkness. Besides, at such a speed, any material object would burst into flame from atmospheric friction alone—including the human body. The whole thing is a kind of madness that has come over you young people nowadays. You've been egged on by a few crackpot scientists who know, in their secret hearts, that they are dominated by self-interest—a desire to exploit the sensational and get themselves talked about."

I was quite fond of my father. He didn't lecture me as often or as sternly as my mother did. Yet I actually detested him when he started talking like that. I would sit on a bench at his side in Central Park and stare at him resentfully in the bright August sunshine. I wonder if the old ever realize how physically repulsive they sometimes seem to the very young? He was almost totally bald, and the skin on his wrists and the flexor surfaces of his hands were as leathery as ancient parchment. The pores of his nose were enlarged, and there were tiny, broken veins in his eyeballs, hairs in his nostrils.

Friends of his own age never seemed to see these things. They even called him well-preserved for his years—just because his body was slight and his shoulders straight and there was a spark of lively intelligence in his eyes. I saw every minute detail of physical degeneration, and on more than one occasion I can remember thinking: *If only he wasn't so ugly!*

Of course, in saner moments, I realized that he was an unusually gentle man. I realized that he loved me and that strangers had a vast respect for him. They knew that his brilliant career as a scholar had made him a legend to younger men in the field of archaeology. But I was the child of a late marriage and his reputation had been established long before I was born. Sometimes I found that reputation easy to underestimate, now that he had retired and had acquired the habit of spending long hours just sitting in the sun, all withered and dry, like some desert creature that had crept out at noon to warm its lizard blood.

"How can you be so positive that there is no life on other planets?" I would protest, knowing in advance what his answer would be, and not caring how much I angered him—taking pleasure in it, in fact. "Isn't it cowardly, anthro-

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pomorphic egoism to say that this 'speck of dust attached to a fifth-rate star' is the only planet in the whole universe that has produced life?"

He would sigh and shake his head. "Isn't it more egotistical to believe that, just because life and consciousness exist here, they must be important enough to exist elsewhere?" "Then why are we here at all?" Despair would make me shout. "What are people for? There must be some reason for us!"

"Why should there be? What justification have you for making such an assumption?" At this point he would always take refuge in his unanswerable formula: "The finite mind cannot understand the infinite."

From what my mother had told me I knew that, years ago, he had been a religious man. All that had stopped when his first wife had died in childbirth with her baby. He had never forgiven God.

As a rule, the formula stopped me. But I remember one afternoon late in August when I attacked it. "Then, to you, the universe is a complete mystery!" I said. "I should think you'd be scared."

"I am sometimes," he answered equably, drawing on his pipe.

"You're old," I told him, as if he did not realize the fact. "Don't you ever wonder what's going to happen to you when you die? Isn't it hard to think of a world without the complex of chemicals and feelings called Ben Draper going on just as if you'd never been there?"

"It's hard," he said quietly and the quietness irritated me. Had the old boy no imagination at all? Didn't he ever even think about death? Obviously it was up to me to widen his horizons.

"If I were in my sixties, I'd realize I didn't have much time left," I told him. "And I'd be curious as well as frightened. I do believe we're here on earth for some purpose and I'm sure there's life on other planets. Human existence wouldn't make sense otherwise."

He had been looking straight ahead during this conversation. Now his gaze shifted to mine and I was surprised to see a look of compassion cross his face. Why should he feel sorry for me? He was the one who was old.

"Does it have to make sense on our terms?" he asked. "We have no evidence of life on other planets."

"No evidence? Really, father, you should read the books about the UFO's. Why, they say—"

"Oh, come now, Bob!" he cut in with a touch of asperity. "You know as well as I do that some astronomer at Harvard has proved that every reported case was either a misinterpretation of the facts or an outright hoax."

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"Nothing has been proved either way," I insisted. "You haven't read *all* the books. You've only read the one widely discussed book that was on your side and I happen to know it left out half the facts."

I forget how that particular argument ended but I do remember that, at one point, I said: "If the universe is such an enigma to you, then I can't see how you can avoid living in fear. Mystery is the source of all fear."

He answered me thoughtfully. "No, Bob. Mystery has little to do with fear—if it's a mystery people are familiar with. Birth and death are impenetrable mysteries. But we are so used to them that, most of the time, we seldom even think about them."

"Then what *is* fear?" I demanded.

"The totally unexpected," he replied. "If I see a man die, I may be shocked or saddened. But I will not be frightened. But if, after his death, his corpse began to stir and move about I would be frightened out of my wits. That's why most people will deny the very existence of the unexpected—no matter what evidence may be offered to back it up."

"Is that why you deny the very existence of flying saucers?"

That rattled him a little, I think. He was silent for a while and I was content with my victory. And then, a few days later, it happened.

It was late afternoon. The sun was just setting, casting long, sombre shadows across the dusty grass. The rich facade of buildings to the south, laid bare by the park, was powdered by a glitter, almost like gold-dust. High above the buildings, in the cloudless sky, something tilted, caught the sun and flashed like a slowly revolving mirror.

My gaze lingered where the flash had been. For a few seconds I saw nothing more. Then there was another flash and I saw an odd, oval shape, very far away. It was moving incredibly fast in a tight, spiral descent. It seemed unbelievable because there was a complete absence of sound, save for the remote mutter of traffic which we had been hearing all afternoon.

I touched father's arm. "What's that?" I gasped.

He turned his head slowly. The utter astonishment in his eyes told me that he saw the incredible object too. And then I discovered that, despite my boastful, confident talk, I had never really believed in flying saucers until that moment. And now I was truly frightened. Father had been right. It is not the mysterious, but the unexpected that is unutterably terrifying.

I think he was frightened, too. We were quite alone in that part

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of the park. It was too late in the day for the nursemaids and children, and there were no strollers on the walk. We were nowhere near a crosstown highway or auto parking lot. I gripped his arm tightly and whispered, almost without breath: "What is it?"

He answered with the same breathless awe: "God knows."

The saucer was quite close now. It seemed incredible that it could move so silently and with such unimaginable speed. It was a flattened sphere, huge and silvery, and there seemed to be portholes or windows in the flattened spherical surface which curved upward from its base.

Suddenly it was gone—almost as if someone had turned a switch and annihilated it. I thought of how an electric light goes out when the current is turned off, but there was no click, no faintest echo of sound. The object seemed to have no capacity at all for generating waves of sound.

I don't know how long we sat there, too dazed to move or even to think clearly. Finally father said: "I suppose you'll have a great deal to say about this."

"No," I answered bitterly. "I don't want to be laughed at." His rebuke was mild. "There's an Arab proverb—*Beware the curse of an answered prayer.* I can almost believe your talk conjured up that vision out of empty air. It wasn't . . . pleasant, was it? Suggestion, perhaps . . . And now we must be getting back home, Bob, or your mother will be worried."

I didn't answer. I was convinced that we had seen a spaceship from another world. But I no longer felt like arguing about it. You don't argue when you're completely sure. Earlier I had really been fighting my own doubts, but now . . .

I suppose the incident reinforced my resolution to go into aircraft designing when I left engineering school. A week after my graduation my father died. I was surprised to discover how great a shock his death was to me. It was almost as if I had unconsciously assumed that he was immortal, and that no part of my world could exist without him. He was part of things as they always were and should be—a sure refuge of sympathetic understanding in any crisis. Somehow, I no longer remembered the bald head and the thin, wrinkled hands that had so offended my fastidious adolescence.

I remembered only the gentle smile and the long, thoughtful talks and the personal sacrifices that had made it financially possible for me to go to engineering school at all.

Busy as I was in the long years that followed, there were moments when something would remind me so poignantly of my

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father that I would cringe inwardly to think of all the times I had been rude or ungrateful to him. I wished that I had told him, before he died, how I really felt about him.

It was just at the turn of the century, when we were all so excited about having the year 2000 on our calendars and check-books instead of the old, familiar numerals, that I became associated with René Dubuque and his unified force-field theory. I had made a small fortune in engineering and lost it again, and I had quit General Jets in a huff because they had patented my inventions in their corporate name without even raising my salary.

Dubuque was a veteran of the 1961 war, and he had been associated with the force-field pioneers, Clerouin and Plantier, in the French air force. He had lost one foot to radiation, but otherwise he was sound of limb and mind. He had ideas, but no money. I had no money either. But I knew where I could get some and I knew of a place out west where we could set up shop cheaply while we worked on our first, experimental force-field aircraft.

Old John Logan, my late wife's brother, was a Nevada uranium billionaire. He knew nothing about physics, but he had been appointed Secretary of the Interior when the votes of the populous, radiation-free, but arid, southwest elected an administration pledged to a national weather-control policy of rain five-days-a-week. The only way I could explain the force-field theory to him was by taking a rather unusual looking child's toy magnet into his office along with some steel sewing needles.

After he'd played with the trinket for a while, I said:

"Now just suppose there's a field of force like that magnet—only invisible and a thousand times bigger. It's physical, but not material. It's energy, but not matter. You can't see it or touch it, but it can move material objects about precisely as that toy magnet moves needles. Suppose you could control the position of that big, invisible magnet as easily as you can control the position of this little toy—simply by moving your hand.

"All you'd have to do then would be to build an aircraft which would be attracted as inexorably to that field of force. Move the force-field in any direction, and your aircraft would leap after it, just as those needles leap after the magnet, without fuel or combustion or any other source of power. If you can raise the power of your force-field as high as you please, you can raise the velocity of your aircraft as high as you please. Gravity—another field of force—is not ignored. It's used as

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part of the set up, when the craft is close to earth. René says he can go faster than any jet this way and maneuver on a dime."

"But stress and strain?" protested Logan. "And friction! My God, man, you'd be in flames. You'd—"

"Wait a mintue, John," I said. "The air around the plane will be affected by the force field, too. This craft doesn't simply blast its way through resistant air, like an old-fashioned jet. A cocoon of air in layers of graduated velocity moves with the craft, and those velocities diminish the farther away each layer gets from the craft itself.

"There's absolutely no friction between air and plane or between air and air. The very molecules of the pilot's own body are moved by the field of force—so there's no strain on him either. He's as unconscious of the effect on his body as we are unconscious right now of the effect of gravity on our bodies. It's what French mathematicians call an 'elegant' solution of all our aerodynamic problems. In two years, the jet will be obsolete. We shall land on the moon before I die."

He shook his head doubtfully. "Do you realise that you'll be sixty-six this year?"

I looked at him steadily. "Sure. I haven't much to look forward to now—unless I can celebrate my seventieth birthday on Mars."

John was in his seventies himself, so I was quite sure he understood. He gave me the money—or, rather, he loaned it to me at fifteen percent interest. We were both glad that the unrealistic laws about cabinet officers not speculating privately had been repealed after the Third War. It was so much more honest and practical to fuse big business and big government in a monolithic operation, where Senators became "the businessman for Oil" or "the businessman for Electronics" instead of "the gentleman from Virginia" or "the gentleman from Massachusetts."

While we were working on the ship, I told René about the one time I had seen a UFO—long ago in 1956. "It wasn't too different from this ship in appearance," I told him. "UFO's are still an unsolved mystery. But I won't be surprised if we find other force-field ships when we get out there—ships based on some other planet perhaps, or even on some other solar system."

René had all of a Frenchman's peculiarly Gallic blend of caution and dash. The caution was uppermost now. "Maybe, some day," he said. "But we'll just go out to the landing-field satellite for our trial run."

It was one of the ironies of progress that, three years earlier, the United States had launched a huge, unmanned, artificial satel-

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lite with a landing field for jets, before we had any jets that could leave the stratosphere. It was something like the first Eisenhower satellite, only much bigger and farther afield. It circled the earth at a distance half-way to the moon, waiting for the day when man would finally break out of his prison of air. We two might go down into history as the first men to land on it.

I didn't argue with René. He knew far more about the principle of our machine than I did, but, strangely, the longer we worked on it, the more doubtful he grew. At last he said: "Bob, I don't know what will happen when I pull that stick. The theory is all right mathematically, but . . ."

"But what?"

"What happens when you translate such abstract mathematics into concrete terms? Can it be done at all? There's one equation . . ." He tried to explain it. I'm good at math, but I'm not that good. René was a genius. Or a crackpot. They say a genius is a successful crackpot and I was betting on his success.

He wanted to take that first trial run to the satellite alone. I wouldn't let him. So, it was the 22nd of August, 2010, that we had the thing towed out of the hangar onto our rough landing-field and shook hands all around and got in and sealed the door. Just the two of us, in the plane, and the mechanics, on the ground, to see us off. No reporters or TV commentators. No friends or family. Rather like the Wright brothers in those early days at Kitty Hawk.

René pulled the stick, as he called the master lever. I had braced myself for some sort of physical shock, but there was none, as he had predicted. There was no sound at all and I didn't have the slightest sense of motion. The only thing that happened was that the view beyond the quartz windows vanished like a light that is switched off.

One moment I was looking at the Arizona meadow, lush green under the state-controlled rain, and the commonplace faces of the mechanics, stirred by a look of awe, just as if they were great mathematicians, like René, and knew what it was all about. The next moment there was nothing beyond the windows but a cloudy blur.

My throat felt dry. I poured a glass of water from the thermos. I marvelled to see how still the water was in the glass when I set it down on the table. Even in the most modern stratosphere jets, it would have rocked a little.

"How fast are we going?" My voice sounded thin.

René smiled as if he were regaining confidence now that we were over the first hurdle. "About twice the speed of light."

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"So Einstein was wrong? God has no speed limit?"

"Evidently not. I'm going to slow down now. We mustn't overshoot the mark."

I laughed. "At this speed, we should be half way to Aldebaran by now!"

René shook his head. "You know we've just been circling the earth. That was our plan. Now, if my calculations are right, we'll come down on the artificial Satellite's airstrip as neatly as a jet on earth."

"And if your calculations are wrong?"

For such pessimistic questions, God has given the French a perfect answer—the shrug, an eloquent, flexible gesture that can be shaded many ways without speech. René's was a work of art. It left nothing more to be said.

After a few moments, his face whitened. "I can't locate the satellite on our mass-density scope."

I breathed twice. "Maybe we did overshoot the mark. What do we do now?"

"Try to go back." He frowned. "We can't run out of fuel, of course. The force-field we're tapping is as inexhaustible as gravity itself. But our oxygen is limited. We must land soon."

"You mean go back to Earth?"

He nodded grimly. "We're hardly equipped for landing elsewhere. This was supposed to be a short trial run. I'll try to set her down on our own field in Arizona, but, right now, I'd settle for any place on Earth."

He regarded me steadily. "Don't get the wind up, Bob. Remember: this machine can hover at the lowest altitudes. There'll be no crash landing."

If your calculations are correct, I thought. But I didn't say it. I had grown up a bit in the last fifty-four years.

I had nothing to do but sit, while he twiddled dials and looked at gauges. His frown did not fade. I summoned what reserves of fortitude I had to face instant annihilation. What else can happen if something goes wrong at twice the speed of light? But if René himself could take it, I was determined he shouldn't see me crack.

When the silence became unbearable, I said: "Is there any chance we really have overshot our mark and may come down on the moon or Mars itself? Like Columbus looking for India and landing in America?"

"Anything is possible in space." He pushed another lever. "If you're right—if Mars really is inhabited by intelligent beings who use field-force ships—maybe they can show us what went wrong with our navigation."

"And if we land on an uninhabited planet?"

"We'll have to stay there the rest of our lives. I wouldn't dare take off again unless I can dis-

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cover what went wrong and correct it. We've dropped below the speed of sound now. We're ambling along like those early twentieth century jets."

I looked towards the windows. I could see sunshine and a cloudless, blue sky. I went over to the windows and looked out. Far, far below, like a colored relief map in miniature, there spread a strange country. Or should I say a strange planet? We were heading towards the towers of an unfamiliar city.

"Buildings!" I cried.

"I've got it on the scope," he answered. "There's a clear tract in the middle of the buildings where we can land. Any canals?"

"Yes, two. They run right through the city. And I can see some structures like bridges, though they're not nearly so big as our bridge across the English Channel."

What he saw on the Debenham mass-density scope was symbolic of height, mass and density only, so I reported actual, visual details to him from the windows. "It seems quite a large city—about half the size of New York. The buildings are tall—something like the skyscrapers they had in Manhattan before the Third War. I can see things moving now. I'm not sure whether they are machines or animals!

"They're alive!" I cried suddenly, as we got really close. "Two of them, right below, seem to be looking up at us!"

"Am I too close to them?"

"No, you can land now."

We tested the atmosphere with a Geiger. No radiation. Then we tested for oxygen and other gases. There was some oxygen, but there were other things, too. We got a reading on the borderline of toxic. We hadn't much choice, so we risked opening a valve and taking a few breaths of the alien air. It was sour, with an acrid smell and gritty, barely breathable for human beings.

We got out. The stuff underfoot was green and looked just like our grass. There were trees, too, very like ours. Yet there was something queerly unfamiliar about the whole scene when you looked at it closely. Gazing across the grass at some buildings, I didn't see any solar heating plants in their walls and their roofs weren't large or flat enough for jet landing-strips.

"If this is Mars, they're a backward people," I said.

"But they are people." René grabbed my arm. "Look!"

Beyond one of the trees, a humanoid figure sat on a low wooden bench, with a smaller being beside him. They were wearing clothes that were more than strange—distorted and, somehow, faintly absurd. We were behind them, where we could see only their clothes. I think we were both

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a little afraid to discover what sort of bodies were in those garments.

René looked at me helplessly and whispered: "I speak seven languages, but here . . ."

"We'll have to let them see us," I whispered back. "We need their help."

René stepped forward in front of the creatures, who looked so nearly human from behind. They didn't move and it was then that I saw the horror in René's face.

Silently my lips shaped words: "What is it?"

"He doesn't see me!" René's voice was loud and hoarse. "He doesn't hear me. But he's a man. Don't you understand?"

René was always one step ahead of me, in designing and everything else. I had the faintest glimmering that something was dreadfully wrong and that it was something I should have realized long ago. But I couldn't guess what it was.

René looked at me with the eyes of the damned. "We've gone further than we expected. That equation that I couldn't make you understand—I've got it now. Our force-field is the mythical tesseract come true. The thing beyond the cube that can move in any one of four directions, but always at a right angle to the other three. And that fourth direction—that fourth angle of ninety degrees that completes some great circle—is not space at all, but what we call time.

"No wonder these two can't see us. No wonder they could only see our force-field plane when it was in motion, descending. No wonder they can't hear us. Don't you see what we are? Now—in relation to them? We are *revenants*—ghosts who have come back from their future. Look around you. This is Central Park in nineteen fifty-seven!"

I ran forward to where I could see their faces. I cried in a great voice: "Father! Father—it's me! It's Bob!"

The old man didn't look up. The boy's gaze went straight through me, as though I were not there, and I looked into my own face of fifty-four years ago and saw all its impudent, brutal conceit. And I heard my own voice: "Your whole generation is lazy, father—mentally and physically lazy."

After a while the old man said: "We must be getting back home, Bob or your mother will be worried . . ."

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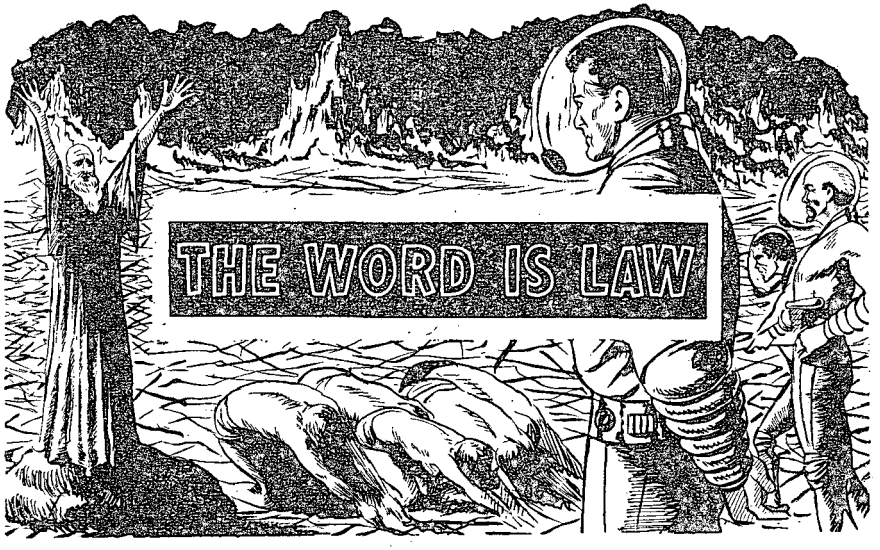

Without irreverence and with moving simplicity the aliens re-enacted the most momentous event in human history.

by JOHN D. ODOM

As the Federation's survey ship, *The General Curry*, gradually reverted from hyper to normal space, every man aboard her grew tense with anticipation. Fortunately for morale, perhaps, the auto-astrogator indicated a ten-light-year-vector margin of safety from any reasonably likely collision course. But things were not normal with the *General Curry* and the crew knew it. Discipline prevailed, however, and the ship's outer skin was within ten degrees of the critical before Captain Bill Carling ordered emergency reversion.

Lights flashed, collision claxtons blurted, and Captain Carling's voice rang out clearly above the warning signals. "Keep your harnesses fastened and leave acceleration shields at maximum." Carling's orders were crisp, like

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the machine he had been trained to be for just such an emergency.

Tom Jimson, the astrogator interrupted. "Sir, there's a planet of Class Two density coming close—vector eight points, thirty minutes collision course. This was manually computed. Allow five minutes, or two points, for error."

"Thanks, Jimson. Compute approximate matching orbital velocity!"

"Have done, Captain. They are on your scanner."

"Roger . . . Captain to engineer—stand by."

"Tuber ready, Sir."

"Okay. Set tubes one and three at forty-five degrees . . . seven and nine at thirty . . . stand by for a ten count down."

The rockets thundered their miniature atomic explosion. Acceleration shields became ridged. The rate of closure dropped swiftly to zero. They had matched velocities but with what . . . and where?

Captain Carling was trembling. But in a way he felt good, for he had weathered his first emergency reaction test. This had been the *real* thing, quite different from the artificial, practice emergencies created at the academy for spacemen in training. His very life and the lives of the entire crew had depended upon his split-second decision. He glanced at the picture of his grandfather directly above the scanner, and brought his hand sharply up in a half-salute. He thought for an instant that the stern face had relaxed, that he could detect on it a slight smile of approval.

"I doubt if he ever smiled in his whole charmed life," he said to himself. He touched the shield release and moved toward the astrogation dome. Several of the crew were peering over Jimson's head now.

Carling could understand their interest, for he had caught a glimpse of the huge green sphere filling two-thirds of the visiscreen. Jimson was frantically making a spectro-analysis of the atmosphere—there seemed to be a great deal of it.

Glancing up, Jimson said, "It's Rigel Three for sure, Captain. But no one ever knew there was a Three before. She's loaded with atmosphere. Plenty of oxygen—too much, maybe. I can't detect any poisonous elements, but Karl and the lab boys will go down for a sample when you are ready."

The officer personnel were very informal when not in the presence of the crew. After several hours of analyzing, checking and rechecking their instruments they were presently sipping what passed for coffee in the twenty-second century.

Jimson was saying, "I can't understand it. I've gone over the *gator* a dozen times, just like at the academy—disassembled and

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reassembled. It's got me! I can't find a thing wrong with it!"

"Auto-astrogators don't lie," Carling said. "But by *Dominus,* this one did. We have accomplished one thing at any rate. Hull temperature has dropped to norm since we matched orbits with the twilight zone. Thank *Dominus,* old Three wobbles instead of rotates. You know, and this is interesting, she has about the same wobble as Mercury!"

"And darn near as hot," Karl said. "We'll have to wear suits if we go down for astro-fixes. The atmosphere is breathable for a short time, but you can be sure it's hotter than forty hells!"

Jimson interrupted, "Captain—" He paused while he thought out a serious and respectful approach, for the names he was about to mention were sacred to the spaceman. "I have a feeling your illustrious forebears, General Bill Curry and Colonel John Carling would have been proud of you this trip."

Carling flushed. "Any . . . one . . . of you . . ." he floundered, "could have done it." He paused, then went on quickly, "Having to fall back on manuals once in a while has its compensations. It breaks the routine, and also counts as a simulated drill. However, let's not forget! We have already lost five light years astral time. I'm almost afraid to speculate as to how long it will take us for reorientation. You see, completely new tapes will have to be made. The ones we have were computed by using Procyon One's orbit as our vectoring-out point."

"I'm ready to go down for a sample of old wobbling Three when you give the word, Captain," Karl said, eagerly.

"Okay. Take Sergeant Bronson, and Chris Nazareth for Communications. Jimson can handle the scouts better than anyone else."

"Thanks, Captain," Jimson said, grinning. "I was hoping you would say that."

"But remember. Make contact every thirty minutes. And just as an added precaution you'd better take two marines with viberators. You never know," he finished with sober emphasis.

Twenty minutes later, staring down from the cruising scout, the land bathed in a hazy brightness beneath them, Jimson cried out, "Good grief! I'll be a bowlegged Centaurian if that's not a city I see."

"I think you're right, Lieutenant."

"I know I'm right," said Jimson. "Sergeant, tell Chris Nazareth to get me Captain Carling on the visiscreen."

"Yes, Sir."

When the Captain's face appeared on the screen Jimson told him what they had seen without wasting adjectives. "Shall we go

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down for a better look, Captain?" he asked.

"All right, Jimson. I am going to let you make this contact on your own! But be certain you follow contact procedure to the letter. Wear suits no matter what the analysis indicates. Take Chris Nazareth and a marine. Contact the scout every five minutes. And have the scout report to me at fifteen minute intervals. And Jimson, you'd better take one of the Centaurian translators."

"Thanks, Captain. I know that procedure manual like the back of my hand."

"I know you do, Jimson. I guess I'm just overly cautious."

"No, Captain. That's why we're still alive," Jimson said almost reverently.

"Over and out."

Jimson turned to the men. "Taking her down, boys. And here's hoping the females don't possess horns like those Sirius Four specimens had . . . whatever they were," he said.

They were in a gay mood as the little craft settled down easily on her landing fins. Regular pulsating bursts from the side and tail rockets kept her on an even keel, and prevented the gravity plates from buckling.

As the survey scout hovered the undertubes slowly burnt out a clearing, while Karl, Sergeant Bronson, Chris Nazareth and the two marines kept their eyes glued hypnotically to the scanner. Finally the ship settled. Thin coils of smoke ascended from the dying flames, and the tubes cooled and contracted with metallic crackles.

"By all that's holy—a welcoming committee!" Karl exclaimed, his voice sounding almost unnaturally high-pitched in the silence. The others stared mutely.

"It can't be. It—it just isn't possible," Chris muttered, mechanically. He mopped a perspiring brow. "Read it to me, Lieutenant. Please tell me I haven't blown my tubes."

Jimson read aloud slowly: *"Welkom Christ ob Nasreth, Savor ob Wold."*

The letters were crudely formed, a little like the writing of a child just learning to print. But it was more than a childish scrawl to the five-member crew of the Federation scout. It was the first time in human history that the alien inhabitants of an unexplored planet had communicated in what resembled terrestrial language. And what was even more astounding—they were apparently welcoming a *member of the crew.*

"Scout to *General Curry,*" Jimson signaled urgently. "Come in *General Curry.* Over."

"General Curry. Yes, Jimson, what is it?"

"Well, you won't believe it—but here goes!" After a difficult

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period of sputtering and static, Jimson finally got over to Carling what to him must have sounded like the babblings of a drunk.

"You didn't take any of that Venetian wine with you, by any chance?"

"Now, Captain, you know me better than that," Jimson said. "Please listen carefully. I'm connecting the centranslator . . . You hear that? They are chanting an unmistakable welcome to Chris."

"By *Dominus,* they are! Make contact. Follow the book to the letter!"

AS JIMSON, Chris Nazareth and the marine approached the circle the aliens were, with one exception, all kneeling with their heads bowed. The exception was an old man with a white beard. He alone stood with his head upraised, and a glow on his face such as must have adorned the countenances of the prophets of old when they spoke with inspired authority.

He said, "I kneel and kiss your garment, Son of Man, Savior of Quotris, Lord of the Earth." The centranslator clearly amplified each word distinctly.

"What's going on out there?" Karl's interruption came in accents of bewilderment inside their fish bowls.

"Honestly, I don't know," Jimson answered.

"Apparently they don't think Chris is just a member of our crew."

"Well, you'll have to admit he looks like one of those old paintings of Christ. His grave, commanding countenance alone—"

"That must be it!" Jimson exclaimed, a strange, half-stunned wonder in his voice. "That's what the sign says—*Christ.*"

"Chris, turn the centranslator off. Now tune the audo pickup in. Listen to that! It sounds like ancient English, in some peculiar dialect. Doesn't it, Chris?"

Jimson noticed that the old man's features were more of a homo-sapien cast than those of the others. Five or six of the men and women huddled around him had somewhat similar features, but even they seemed in some respects more primitive.

"Come," the old man said. "We must go into Jerusalem. We will feast and rejoice at the coming of the Annointed One. It was so written and the word is *law!*" He was carrying a bent wooden staff. He walked on ahead with Chris, Jimson and the marine on either side, slightly to the rear.

The others followed silently, and at a respectful distance. They were squat, and broad-shouldered, with faces resembling the high-cheekboned countenances of Cro-Magnon Man.

The old man, with his five or six immediate followers, stood out conspicuously. His skin was the

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color of a modern man of a brown-skinned race, but coarser . . . Jimson took note of this.

The marine walked very straight and kept the vibrator at ready, knowing that he could annihilate the entire tribe with a few bursts if necessary. Defense was his job and he had mastered it to perfection. He was a soldier among the stars, where Earthmen were usually looked upon with awe and not infrequently with fear.

Suddenly one of the five or six who most resembled the old man, a slender girl, rushed toward Chris and prostrated herself at his feet. It happened so quickly that the trained reactions of the marine were barely fast enough to enable him to draw a bead with the vibrator.

The surprise momentarily blurred Jimson's awareness of the girl's strange beauty. As she rose to a kneeling position her fast breathing caused her young bosom to undulate gently.

"Shall I stun her, Lieutenant?" the marine asked.

Jimson shook his head. "No. Wait." He turned to the centranslator. "Stand up, girl," he whispered.

"I wait for my Lord to command," she quivered.

Rigel was bearing down, and even in the twilight zone the mercury was soaring. The suit cooling units had to work overtime to hold the heat at a comfortable seventy degrees.

"I am dying. Save me, Lord," she pleaded.

The girl seemed about to faint. Jimson bent, and lifted her none too gently to her feet.

The old man spoke directly to Jimson. "John the Baptist could work miracles," he said, "and your coming is another miracle. I can see that you are kind. *His* disciples would know the meaning of mercy."

Jimson was not aware that he had been kind, quite the contrary. Something about the girl had stirred him to harshness. Suddenly he felt ashamed.

The old man turned to Chris Nazareth. "Long ago one of your prophets came to us from the sky —as you came. My daughter and I have been faithful to his teaching. We wish to serve you, Master, and your disciples as well. We wish *only* to serve you."

"So now I am a disciple?" Jimson sighed. "Well, thanks to the twin moons that was smoothed over. We may as well accompany them. I intend to get to the bottom of this if I have to psychoscan every last one of them. I guess you're the leader, Chris. Lead on, we'll follow."

FOR AN INSTANT the mother ship stood erect on wings of fire. Then its bow slanted downward and it settled gently to rest on a

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crimson cushion less than a hundred feet from the scout.

"Open the air lock!" Captain Carling said to Engineer's Mate Robbins. "We won't need suits to transfer over to the scout."

"What do you suppose Jimson has been talking about for the last three periods? I understood some of it vaguely—about their believing Chris Nazareth to be a god or something. I've got to see for myself," Karl concluded emphatically.

"That goes double," Carling answered. "It's just possible this may require a P II survey for the Supreme Council."

The temperature was still rising when Carling, Karl and another marine set out toward the rambling stone structures that Jimson had described as a city. The ground of Quotris was hard and the tractocar rolled fast and silently. When it pulled up in front of what appeared to be a native stone temple the first thing Carling noticed was the excited throng of aliens. Then he saw Jimson standing in the midst of the crowd.

"Where is Chris?" he asked.

"Still playing his appointed role," Jimson said. "Right now he's in that temple, going through a healing routine. It looks as though we'll have a P II survey on our hands."

"You'll have more than that to worry about," Carling said, pointing to Theliese, "if you let her get anywhere near the ship without more clothes on than she's wearing now."

"I know," Jimson said. "But she happens to be the head man's daughter."

"What have you contributed to the forthcoming P II survey? Anything?"

"Yes, Captain. I'll show you. But suppose we go into my office over here first—so we can take off these blasted suits. At least, for a little while. I can stand heat better than these infernal things."

Ten minutes later Captain Carling said, "John Stover must have been thorough. If what you say is true, he has it all down. By *Dominus* the Council's eye will pop when they hear of this."

"Captain, wait till you see the temple. The whole ship's there. It was the first and only ship from our Solar System ever to travel this far in the early days of space exploration. Stover was the last passenger to survive—the only one to reach this planet alive. They buried the others in space, according to the log. Stover seems to have looked upon his survival as divinely preordained—and spent the rest of his life here laboring in what he would have called 'The Vineyard of the Lord.' "

"Let's get over to the temple," Carling said quietly.

At the feet of a good likeness

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of John Stover—in a metal box with a transparent covering—was the diary. John Stover resembled his long-bearded descendant. The diary was open. Carling read the inscription in silence:

JOHN STOVER
(*Baptist Chaplain*)
Council Ship No. 1

Carling turned to the last page. He read aloud the last notation, *"Some day another will come on the wings of fire as I did, and bring Christ . . ."*

The Captain turned to Jimson. "And then nothing," he said. "He must have died without finishing the last line: *'Bring Christ's teachings to you.'* "

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by SAM MOSKOWITZ

ROCKETS, MISSILES & SPACE TRAVEL by Willy Ley. The Viking Press, New York. 528 Pages. $6.75.

Every field of scientific endeavor has its basic or definitive reference work and this book of Willy Ley's—ever since the appearance of its first edition in 1944—has by virtually unanimous agreement occupied that position in the realm of rocketry and space travel. Imitation is said to be the sincerest form of flattery but if I were Willy Ley, I would begin to be annoyed at the very volume of space travel books that have appeared in the past thirteen years, most of them little more than re-writes of this accurate and scholarly volume.

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make this new volume completely different from all others of its general type. A proud addition to any library.

Willy Ley was a participant in the early German rocket experiments, so he has the tremendous advantage of being able to tell the story from the viewpoint of a man who was *there!* The chapter on the German rocket societies is unreservedly recommended to the readers—and writers—of science fiction.

Similarly, as background to the early rocket experiments Willy Ley has woven into his chronicle little-known works of science fiction, along with a fascinating round robin of early speculations by prophets, crackpots and space-minded scientists. The thought I am trying very explicitly to convey is that this is, without question, a book for the dedicated devotee of science fiction and the discriminating collector in search of background information as well as for the scientifically curious general reader. It has been written with the zest, interest and high spirits which one commonly associates with a work of creative fiction, and therefore can be read purely for entertainment—if the reader so desires. If you don't own it, I can think of no more rewarding literary investment, and you can join the columns of the wise by not even bothering to purchase its flock of imitators.

FRANK KELLY FREAS: A PORTFOLIO. Advent: Publishers, 3508 N. Sheffield Ave., Chicago 13, Ill. 38 pages. $1.50.

The science fiction and fantasy field seems often to give rise to illustrators as creatively imaginative and startlingly off-trail as its authors. Science fiction has had many popular illustrators whose names have adorned with distinction a kind of unofficial hall of fame. They include Frank R. Paul, H. W. Wesso, Elliot Dold, Virgil Finlay, Hannes Bok, Lawrence and a good many others. Among the relatively newer artists is one who may very well win an equally enviable reputation for himself before another year has passed. That brilliant newcomer is Frank Kelly Freas.

In the past, professional magazines and fans have issued not a few portfolios of the art of Virgil Finlay, Hannes Bok and Lawrence. Now ADVENT, which has a very keen eye for the talented work of Convention award winners, has just issued a portfolio of representative art by Frank Kelly Freas, who, it will be remembered, was voted the best science fiction artist of the year at the WSFC in New York a year ago last September.

On the positive side, the samples of black and white artwork display an incredible range of artistic versatility. On the negative side, the very range of Freas'

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techniques leads at times to uneven quality. But the drawings in the main are splendidly imaginative and the collector will find a great deal to admire, and treasure in this portfolio.

THE GREEN ODYSSEY by Philip Jose Farmer. Ballantine Books, New York. 152 pages. $0.35.

There are few authors we are happier to see finally in book and pocket book publication than Philip Jose Farmer. Farmer, who will long be remembered for *The Lovers, The Mother,* and other tales is one of the few important new talents to appear in science fiction during the past fifteen years.

While *The Green Odyssey* is not of the calibre of the two stories mentioned, it is light, easy reading, with a persuasive sense of humor, and a worthwhile bargain at a very low price.

DAMON KNIGHT writes as follows:

"May I correct Sam Moskowitz's hasty misreading of my book, *In Search of Wonder?* Moskowitz says, 'He attributes the shaping of Ray Bradbury's style to Robert Nathan, Christopher Morley and J. D. Salinger . . .'

"The passage in question is not about style, or influence either, but about subject. (Childhood is after all Bradbury's one subject.) Nathan, Morely and Salinger are all nostalgic, childhood-obsessed writers, and it was this comparison that I was making."

The statements in my review of Knight's book published on page 124 of the February 1927 issue of SATELLITE SCIENCE FICTION were based upon a long detailed article about Bradbury which I had written at an earlier date: *Ray Bradbury—The Influence That Shaped Him.* In that article I used several quotes from Knight's book to strengthen my argument. On page 77 of his book Knight says:

"There is so much to say about Bradbury's meaning that perhaps too little has been said about his technique. He is a superb craftsman, a man who has a great gift and has spent fifteen years laboriously and with love teaching himself to use it. 'For here was a kind of writing of which there is never much in any one time—a *style* at once delicate, without rancor, and clear as water or air.' That's Stephen Vincent Benet, writing in 1938 about Robert Nathan! The same words, all but the next to the last phrase, might have been written with equal justice of Bradbury."

I think there can be very little doubt that Knight is referring to style in that paragraph. To claim otherwise would be a difficult exercise in the juggling of semantics. I went on to prove that there were no similarities in the style of Nathan and Bradbury, and presented

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overwhelming evidence that Bradbury had been profoundly influenced by Thomas Wolfe and Ernest Hemingway.

In the same chapter Knight went on to discuss subject matter but in the last paragraph, which is quite obviously a summation, he concludes:

"Learned opinion to the contrary, Bradbury is not the heir of Poe, Irving or Hawthorne; his voice is the voice (a little shriller) of Christopher Morely and Robert Nathan and J. D. Salinger."

In the above summation Nathan is mentioned *again* and previously he is used *only* for style comparison. Morely and Salinger are added, as if one example were not enough. If it was the intent of Knight to offer examples of "childhood-obsessed writers" why Morely, Nathan and Salinger? Why not Mark Twain with *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn;* Charles Dickens with *David Copperfield* and *Oliver Twist;* Booth Tarkington with *Penrod* and *Penrod and Sam?* Then the critical implications would have been incontrovertible!

Therefore, since Morely and Nathan are not generally thought of as "child-obsessed" writers in literary circles and no evidence has been forthcoming to show that they are (it is not evidence to show that an author once wrote about children, since at least one third of the world's population are children and they would naturally be represented in literature. Then Knight uses the phrase "a little shriller." I cannot conceive of a *subject* being shriller but a *style* could be. And since in the first quoted paragraph even the word "style" is used, I feel that Knight was offering a style comparison and one so far off base as to make him suspect of style-deafness.

COMPLETE NEXT ISSUE: A *FRANK BELKNAP LONG* NOVEL

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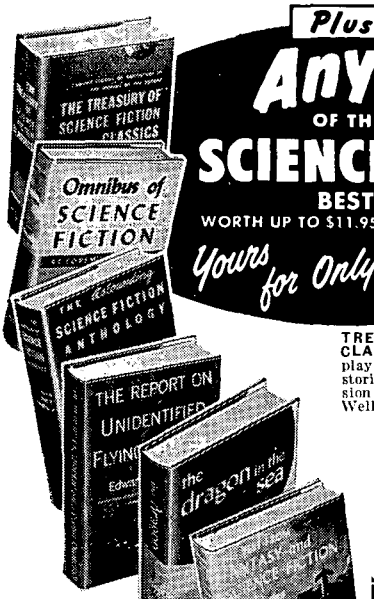
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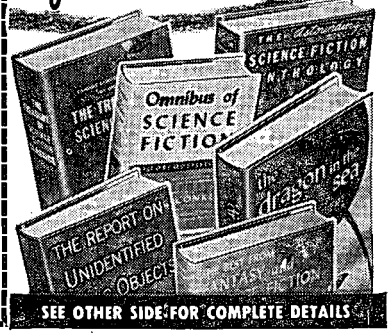

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